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KITH AND KIN.

A Novel.

BY

JESSIE FOTHERGILL,

AUTHOR OF

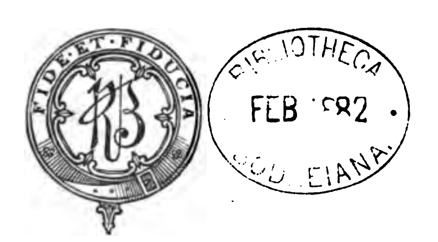
'THE FIRST VIOLIN,' 'PROBATION,' 'MADE OR MARRED,'
'ONE OF THREE,' ETC.

'God be thanked, the meanest of his creatures
Boasts two soul-sides; one to face the world with,
And one to show a woman when he loves her.'

BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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CONTENTS OF VOL. II.



KITH AND KIN.

CHAPTER I.

JUDITH.

MRS. AVESON, closing the parlour-door, bent over Mrs. Conisbrough. 'Eh, but she's very bad, Miss Judith, this bout. Something's upset her, I guess.'

'Yes, indeed!' said Judith, abstractedly. She was forced to withdraw her attention from her mother for the moment, while she wrote with flying pen to Delphine:

'Very bad news. *All* is left to uncle's

grandson, Bernard Aglionby, of whose existence we hardly knew till to-day. I have seen him before. Not one of our names is mentioned. Mamma has taken it to heart, made an awful scene, and had one of her attacks in consequence. She is unconscious now, and cannot be moved. Prepare some things for us, and I will instruct Toby to call for them as he returns from the doctor's. Mr. A. is very courteous and gentle, despite the terrible things mother has said to him. He has placed the house at our disposal. If the doctor thinks you ought to come, I will get him to call and tell you so on his way back.

'Yours, sorrowfully,

'JUDITH.'

'Now, Mrs. Aveson, will you give this to Toby, and tell him to make all speed with it to Yoresett House first, then on to the doctor's; then he must return to Yoresett House, and wait for a parcel? Let him go as fast as he can.'

Mrs. Aveson took the note, and very soon Toby rode out of the yard, on a stout brown cob, which he astonished by his liberal use of a tough switch. Mrs. Aveson returned to the parlour, where Mrs. Conisbrough still lay unconscious. Sometimes these attacks lasted two hours, or rather, once she had had one that lasted so long, and this seemed likely to be as tedious. In vain they applied all the restoratives they could think of, or knew of; she lay rigid, and with a livid, deathly hue upon her face.

Judith was not at first alarmed, nor Mrs. Aveson, who was in every sense of the word 'a friend of the family.' In the intervals of their exertions the woman asked:

'Miss Judith, tell me, is this true, what old Mr. Whaley says? Was the old Squire's will so very unjust?'

'Very unjust, from a moral point of view, Mrs. Aveson. Legally, there was no fault to be found with it.'

'It's a bad hearing. Do you really mean

that he has left *all* to that black-looking young man?'

'Yes, all. He is his grandson. I know nothing of where he found him; yes, I do, though. He must have seen him when we were at Irkford, a week ago to-day! But I know nothing of what passed between them. All I know is that this will was made the night he died——'

'Ay! We were witnesses, me and John Heseltine, who happened to be in the kitchen at the time. Had I known how it was going, never would I have signed. It's a crying shame! People have no right to act in that way, I say; though he was my master, and I liked him well enough for all his queer ways. And this stranger, he's no Aglionby in looks, except that he has a glint of the een something like old master, and a twist in the mouth that's a bit akin to him that's gone. But that long thin body, and that lean black face! No Aglionby was ever like that before. I don't know how we shall

tak' to him, I'm sure. M'appen we'll have to flit.'

'Oh, I hope not, Mrs. Aveson, or we shall have lost all our friends, indeed. But see! is she not coming round a little?'

The hope was deceptive. For two long hours Mrs. Conisbrough lay without consciousness, until her daughter, without losing her presence of mind, began to grow almost faint with fear, and Mrs. Aveson openly expressed her opinion that Mrs. Conisbrough was either dead, or in a trance which would end in death.

She went out of the room at last, in search of some restorative which occurred to her mind, and to look up the road at the back in the hope of catching sight of the doctor on his roadster at the top of the hill, and it was during this absence that at last a flicker of life appeared in the lips and eyes of the unconscious woman.

Her eyes at last opened, slowly and fully; she moved them deliberately and blankly

round, fixed them upon Judith without appearing to recognise her, and said, in a toneless voice:

'Bernarda told me so, uncle. She said they would take him, and that sooner than touch a crust of your bread she would starve.'

'Mother dear, it is I. You are at Scar Foot. Try to remember.'

'And if you had only waited that morning, instead of going off in a passion without leaving me time to explain, I could have told you all about it. But you were selfish and tyrannical to the last, to the last! Oh dear! It is a weary, weary world, and weariest of all for women that are poor!'

She turned her face to the wall, and closed her eyes, but Judith saw two large tears force their way from under the lids and course slowly down her cheeks. All her soul went out in love and pity. Her mother's wandering remarks were for the moment forgotten, though they had at first struck her as strange

and inexplicable. 'Bernarda!' Surely that was the name of the woman her uncle Ralph had married. This grandson was called Bernard, too. And her uncle in a passion with her mother? What did that mean? But she could think of none of these things now; she could only stoop over her mother, and wipe her eyes, and kiss her hand, and conjure her to look up. To her great relief, too, she heard the sound of a horse's hoofs, and directly afterwards the doctor was in the room.

The doctor's orders were what Judith had expected. Her mother must be carried upstairs and put to bed, where she must have the most absolute quiet and repose. A state of the most alarming weakness and prostration had succeeded to the intense agitation and excitement which had brought on the attack. It was long before all was arranged, and before Dr. Lowther could leave his patient, white and weak and hardly conscious where she was, or what was going on around

her. He promised to call the next day, Sunday, enforced again and again the necessity for the most absolute rest, strictly forbade almost all conversation, and departed.

Never had Judith experienced such a feeling as overwhelmed her when she was at last left alone with her mother in the bedroom—the well-known blue bedroom which she had occupied many a score of times—with the lamp lighted on the table, and the dusk outside rapidly gathering into darkness. When the last echo of the horse's hoofs had died away over the hill, there fell upon the place a silence utter and profound, such as can only be known in the very heart of the country—far away from men that strive, from clanging bells remorselessly summoning the multitudes to their toil, from railways that deafen, and traffic that makes weary the heart of man. She went to the window—the broad deepset window—and leaning one knee on the window-seat, she curved her hands upon the pane into a kind of arch, and

pressed her aching forehead upon them. Indistinctly, by the light of a young moon, she could see what Sir Bedivere called 'the waves wap, and the waters wan,' of silent Shennamere, and the shadowy forms of the great fells on the other side, and one solitary, steadily burning light from the village of Busk on the hill across the lake.

It was beautiful, and she loved it—loved it dearly: but was it always to be thus? Was her prospect never to be larger than this? and even this she now no more felt to be her own. In the house of her forefathers she had suddenly become a stranger, a casual guest, and every hour that she now passed there was like a fresh load upon her heart. Surely there must be some way of getting out of it all. Even now her mind was busy with thoughts of escape, as the minds of prisoners and caged birds are wont to be, and will be, to the world's end. Shennamere, and Scar Foot, and Yoresett, and her own home, and this existence, which was neither

life nor death, without either the fulness of the one, or the repose of the other—they had long been bitter realities to her; would the time ever come when they would seem but as a dream that has vanished? Would she ever be able to look back upon them from some height attained of usefulness, or hopefulness, or successful endeavour, and to say with a smile, 'Once upon a time I had no more than those in my life; no prospect wider than Shennamere Water and Raydaleside Fell'? The wonder, the longing, the strenuous effort to force the future to lift its veil were at that moment more passionate, more intense than she had ever known them. Hard hours she had passed, when her heart had fretted as if it must burst with impatience to snap its bonds—bitter hours of self interrogation, 'Why am I here? What was I born for? Who wants me? What is there for me to do?' Such hours as thousands of young women fight through or sink under every day that dawns, in this glorious

kingdom of England, under the model laws, protected by the immaculate social institutions of which we are so proud, in this grandest and greatest of great empires.

Some, whom Fortune favours, come out of the storm into a clear haven, but generally battered more or less. Others are rescued by a man's hand: they marry, have children, and rear them, and we are wont exultantly to point out these cases, and to say, 'See, would you alter the laws under which flourish so beautifully all these talented women who make money, and earn honourable fame; these happy wives and mothers, loved and looked up to by husbands and children and friends?' We are chary of inquiring whether the talented and successful authoresses and artists, the happy wives and mothers, may not have attained their proud position rather in spite of than in consequence of some of our supremely wise and benevolent legal and social institutions, and we most distinctly do not turn to the other side and look over the

edge into that grey twilight country where the failures dwell—the withered-up old maids; the disappointed strugglers after fame or even independence; the heaps and heaps of spoiled lives, of vitality crushed, of promptings of intellect, or talent, or genius repressed—the dreadful limbo of the spirits which have failed to make good their claim to a place in the world.

Judith Conisbrough, though she did not put the situation tangibly before herself, even in her own mind, vaguely felt herself trembling on the brink which divides these two worlds; for it is a narrow ledge, though we trip so carelessly along it; trembling on the verge of that path which separates the 'successful women,' 'the happy wives and mothers,' from this holocaust composed of the failures; of those who had not found favour in the eyes of the world or of men, and who had withered, or were withering away without having known any joys, whether of love and maternity, or of published books,

pictures that sold, or establishments that succeeded. Sometimes she viewed the matter in a half-bantering, half-cynical way, and was inclined to smile—as we are all inclined to smile—at the failures; but to-night deeper emotions were astir—she felt in deadly earnest; she could see no smiling side to the matter; she told herself that she had been suffered to grow to womanhood in the hope that an old man would leave her some of his money when he died; that he had died and left her none, and that she was worse than useless—she was as a withered tree that cumbered the ground; that she must make a struggle soon, or it would be too late; and she asked herself by what right had those who had doomed her to this fate done so?

Thus she stood, leaning against the window, her eyes straining out into the night, her heart beating fast with a vague excitement, her spirit stretching invisible hands towards heaven, uttering an inaudible but passionate, terrible cry, 'Lord, help me!'

A footstep behind her roused her; she turned, bewildered, as one who wakens from a dream, and saw Mrs. Aveson.

'Miss Judith,' said she softly, 'you're doing wrong to be standing here, tiring yourself, and you're in want of food. You've tasted neither bite nor sup since breakfast-time. Go yer ways down into t' parlour,, and there you'll find some coffee, and something to eat, as I've got ready for you. Now go, honey, and I'll bide with Mistress Conisbrough the while. And don't be in any hurry back again. I've nought to do. Go and rest a bit. You'll want your strength.'

'Thank you, very much, Mrs. Aveson,' she said, in a voice weak from fasting and exhaustion following upon excitement and suspense.

Mrs. Aveson took her seat by the bedside, and Judith slowly went downstairs and into the parlour—the fatal parlour in which she had endured so many hard blows. How pleasant it looked! How cosy, and homely, and dear

it was, with the glowing, generous Yorkshire fire, and the bright lamp, and the oaken rafters and panels; the white cloth on the table, and the inviting little meal which Mrs. Aveson had spread for her—coffee in the old square silver coffee-pot, and cream in the ancient ewer of the same shape; the white and the brown bread-and-butter, the egg and the marmalade, and the cold fowl—creature comforts, no doubt, and infinitely beneath the dignified notice of a romance-writer of the highest order, but to Judith the sight of them was overpowering. They were so exactly what she had always been used to see at Scar Foot; they were what had been at her service all the years of her life whenever she came there, and now they every one belonged to a stranger, one with whom, she foresaw, they were to be at strife—at daggers-drawn—unless her mother's bitter resentment subsided; this stranger's bread she was forced to eat, to sustain bodily weakness, with a feeling that it would almost choke her.

Truly, it seemed as if she were destined to eat her bread with tears, and she foresaw no end to the grief in store for them all.

She leaned her elbows on the table, breaking down utterly, and cried piteously; not loudly, but with silent intensity. Her head ached, her heart throbbed — she was wretched!

The handle of the door turned; a footstep paused, a voice, curt and surprised, said:

'Oh, Miss Conisbrough, I beg your pardon. I will not intrude upon you.'

Judith started up, and saw Bernard Aglionby, this 'new master'; this strong man, who seemed to her to have stepped to the front, and put his hand with remorseless grip upon the one chance of peace and happiness there had been for them all, and crushed it as if it had been a fly. Her tears dried as if by magic.

'Pray come in!' she said; 'Mrs. Aveson asked me to come down and have something to eat, and I had forgotten——'

She had almost added, 'your very existence,' but paused in time.

He accepted her invitation, came forward, and closed the door; acting upon her hint, and taking no open notice of her tears, though she dried them without disguise before his very eyes.

He looked at her, and his face wore a keen, sharp, hard expression, as it always did when he was studying those whom he did not know; an expression which by no means betokened dislike of the said persons, but was simply a mask which his own face took in his reserve. To show himself as he was, to those of whose nature he knew nothing, was a thing which it was not in his nature to do. To fulfil the duties of host could however commit him to nothing, and he had decided quietly to ignore poor Mrs. Conisbrough's warnings, and distinctly to assume the position of master in the house which now belonged to him.

'I am glad Mrs. Aveson has persuaded

you to come down,' he said. 'You must have fasted long, and, after all your anxiety, must stand in need of something. Would you not prefer wine to this coffee?'

'No, thank you; I seldom touch it,' said she, seating herself, and pouring out the coffee.

'Pray send me away, if my presence annoys you,' he added, standing against the mantelpiece, his back to the fire, and his face in the shade.

'Not in the least,' replied Judith coldly, as she leaned back, languid and exhausted, too exhausted to eat. He saw this, and stepping forward, urged her to try to eat something.

'You must eat,' he said. 'Dr. Lowther—that is his name, isn't it——?'

'Yes.'

'I saw him, and he told me that Mrs. Conisbrough would require many days of absolute repose before she could possibly leave.'

'I—yes—I am afraid so. I—we—you

cannot imagine how I regret having thus to inflict my mother and myself upon you, at such an inopportune time, and—and after such a scene.'

She spoke with a deep blush of mingled pride and embarrassment, and her last words came with difficulty.

'Pray do not think of that. Mrs. Conisbrough's recovery must be your first consideration,' said Bernard, who was, unaccountably to himself, fascinated by the voice and manners of his guest.

There was something in the situation which appealed to his fancy. He had imagination enough to understand that he saw Miss Conisbrough under exceptional circumstances, trying ones, also, and he felt a keen interest in watching her behaviour under those circumstances. So far he had found it admirable.

He took cynical views of life and human nature, which views his new prosperity and easy circumstances would be sure to mellow

and modify. As yet there had not been time for this effect to take place. He was still the old Bernard Aglionby, sardonic and mocking; and he thought he had found confirmation of his views on human nature in Mrs. Conisbrough's fury at being left penniless—even in Mr. Aglionby's brutal caprice (as such he regarded it, though it so greatly benefited him) in thus leaving her penniless—in her threat to dispute a will which no English court would for a moment think of setting aside.

So far, he felt his theories as to the predominance of self-interest over all other interests strongly supported by facts. As for Miss Conisbrough, he did not know yet. He very much wished to know. He had not been able to forget the sadness, the deep sorrow of her eyes, as she had turned to look at him while her mother lay fainting. All these various considerations prompted his words, 'Pray do not think of that,' to which she answered :

'You are very kind, but I do and must think of that. It is the sort of thing one cannot help thinking of.'

'Is it?' said he.

He had been watching her as she leaned back in her chair, trifling with her knife and fork, and now with his usual impetuousness he exclaimed:

'You really must excuse me, but you are my guest, and I must look after you. Do have some more cold fowl. I beg you will. You will need your strength; and you must not starve yourself.'

He seized the dish, and placed another piece on her plate.

Judith looked surprised, but overcoming her languor, tried to eat the fowl, and succeeded better.

'Nothing like trying,' observed the new ruler of Scar Foot, rubbing his nervous-looking hands together, and with a gleam of encouragement in his dark eyes.

Judith, looking at him ever more and more

attentively, came to the conclusion that his was a face of which it was impossible to say whether the agreeable or disagreeable in feature and expression predominated in it. Now and again the lips relaxed in their cynical curve, and the dark eyes softened, and the corrugated brow grew smooth and pensive. Then, seizing this fleeting moment of softness, one was tempted to say, 'Good!' Again, the cynical curve returned to those lips and marred their carving. The eyes were filled with a spark of anything but kindly feeling, and the brow was wrinkled up in lines which seemed to imply that its owner had ceased to expect the sun to shine, or the moon to be bright again, and that he experienced a faint wonder at finding others who still cherished any delusions on those points; and then Judith and others must infallibly have said of that face, 'Not good.' Of one thing alone she felt sure, and that was that his face was neither a common nor an uninteresting one.

She smiled faintly in answer to his last remark. It had not occurred to her to wonder how she should treat him. For her own part, she was not sorry for the result of her Uncle Aglionby's will—all that she regretted in it was that Scar Foot had passed to a stranger, and that her mother had said things to that stranger, of such a nature as to offend the meekest of men, and, however doubtful she might be as to some points of his character, she was very sure that meekness was not one of them. What had overwhelmed her, had been the utter upsetting of all that had appeared to her most trustworthy and most stable — her uncle's regard, his good intentions, his plighted word. And she was terribly ashamed of the display of anger made by her mother that morning.

'It is strange that we should have met before,' she observed, not wishing to maintain a churlish silence.

'Yes, very. I little thought, as I stood beside you at the Liberal Demonstration,

that you were the nearest relation I had.'

'*I*—a near relation ?'

'Surely you are my third cousin. That's near, when one has no others nearer.'

'Third cousins—I suppose we are,' said Judith, musingly. 'I had not thought of it in that light.'

'And you are resolved that you never will think of it in that light,' he said, a flash of sarcasm in his smile. 'Well, I cannot wonder at that. To you, my conduct in turning up at such a time must have appeared more scurvy than cousinly, to say the least of it.'

'I never said so,' said Judith, gravely. 'I do not wish to say so; for I do not understand the circumstances. How did you meet my uncle ? The next time we saw you, you were at the theatre with——'

She stopped suddenly short, and looked at him.

'With Lizzie—Miss Vane, I mean—the

girl I am engaged to,' replied Bernard, composedly. 'Did you notice her?'

'Yes, but I scarcely saw her, really. I caught a glimpse of her face, which seemed to me exceedingly pretty. But you did not speak to my uncle then.'

'He came to see over the warehouse in which I was one of the salesmen; I was deputed to show him round. We got into conversation. But I think he saw some likeness, or something, that made him suspect who I was. He asked my name. Then he told me by degrees who he was, and invited me to come and visit him here, which proposal I declined with scant courtesy, I fear. He pressed a few home-truths upon my consideration; I returned his presents in the same coin; we shook hands, as a concession on either side, and parted. You must know the rest better than I do.'

'Yes, we all know the rest pretty well, I imagine. We know the end of it.'

'I hope not, Miss Conisbrough,' he said

earnestly. Judith seemed to him so calm, so staid and eminently reasonable a person, that he felt he could speak to her on terms of almost business-like equality; it struck him that here was an admirable opportunity for declaring his views upon the vexed subject of his grandfather's will, to one who would hear them without heat or prejudice. As for Mrs. Conisbrough, he considered, with an inward feeling of some contempt, that a woman who could conduct herself as she had done that morning, was quite hopeless: he was resolved not to have any further consultation with her. If he could enlist Judith on his side, no doubt she could bring about an arrangement. She must have some influence over her weaker mother, and he would infinitely prefer to conduct the negotiation he contemplated through her.

'I hope not,' he repeated. 'If you suppose that I consider my grandfather's will a just one, or that I am capable of taking advan-

tage of it to the full extent, you do me injustice indeed. I am a very rough fellow, I know. I have had to fight the world inch by inch, and have been battered about from my childhood up, and I know it has soured me, and made me an uncivil, pessimistic creature. The only time Fortune ever smiled upon me was when she threw me in the way of my sweetheart, and made her take pity on me and promise to marry me.' ('His face is more good than bad, I am quite certain now,' Judith decided.) 'But in all my knockings about, I don't think I ever took a mean advantage of any one weaker or worse off than myself—at least, I hope not. Mrs. Conisbrough is unfit to speak of business at present; indeed, to me it seems that with her evident tendency to become violently agitated, she ought not to speak of it at all. Perhaps she will name you her delegate. I am sure you have a cool head. At any rate, we must have a discussion as soon as may be. I

cannot consider anything settled until that has been settled. Mr. Whaley will help us, I am sure, for so monstrously unjust a will cannot possibly be literally carried out.'

'I see you wish to be fair,' said Judith, calmly, 'but such things are difficult to arrange. I cannot answer for my mother; I think she has been iniquitously treated. But for myself and one of my sisters I can answer. I know that nothing short of starvation would induce us to touch a penny of Mr. Aglionby's property.'

She said this without heat, but with a calm determination which he saw was earnest.

'Because that property has been left to me?' he said hastily, 'because you would not——'

'Not at all; but because of certain events which have lately occurred—certain things which passed between my uncle and me. This will is a decisive thing at last. I hope

that now my sister and I will be able to carry out the desire we have always had, and work, as we should have been taught to do, and made to do from our childhood.'

'I am sorry you do not altogether agree with me. But,' he added quickly, 'you will not oppose my wish that your mother, at any rate, should receive the treatment which is her due?'

'No, I shall not oppose that,' replied Judith. And so impressed was he by her manner, and by every word she said, that he felt as if the cause were gained whose side she took.

'Thank you very much for that promise,' he answered. 'It will make it much easier for me. You will of course be the best judge as to when it is fitting to speak to Mrs. Conisbrough of the matter.'

'It must not be now, nor for some days to come,' replied Judith, rising. 'I will wish you good-night, Mr. Aglionby, and go to my mother, who I am sure must want me.'

'Must you go? Then good-night.' He rose too. 'Miss Conisbrough, are you my enemy?'

'No.'

'Then will you prove it, and acknowledge our cousinship by shaking hands with me?'

Judith looked at the hand he held out—at him—at the hand again; put her own into it, and repeated, 'Good-night.'

'I hope you will rest well,' he replied, holding open the door as she passed out.

'I have shaken hands with him—what will Delphine say?' was Judith's reflection as she went upstairs. She found her mother asleep. She let Mrs. Aveson go, and seated herself beside the bed, folded her hands together, and thought.

'No, he does not know,' she reflected. 'I should be paralysed by the possession of that money—of any of it. But it shows a generous mind to wish to give us some of it, after what mamma said this morning. He has had his troubles, too—anyone can see

that. I dare say he could tell a tale of how he has been neglected, and disappointed. His eyes are good—they are not afraid to meet yours. When they are not mocking you they are pleasant. Oh, I hope mamma will come to terms with him! A long strife would be so fearful—and then if he did get angry with her, he could crush her to atoms.'





CHAPTER II.

A LANDOWNER.

WHEN Judith had gone, Bernard felt he had a duty to fulfil. His conversation with Miss Conisbrough had brought it again to his mind. It was the duty of writing to Lizzie Vane, to acquaint her with his new fortunes—and hers, for of course she was to be the partaker for the future of all his joys and sorrows. He distinctly felt it to be a duty: was it not also a pleasure? As that thought occurred to him, he started up, muttering:

'By Jove! of course it is!'

And he seized pen and paper, and scrawled off these lines, in the fulness of his heart :

'My dearest Lizzie,

'You will see from the date of this that I am in the house of my fathers. You will wonder, too, what I am doing here, after all I have said to you about my determination never to enter it. What I have to tell you, my darling, is a very serious matter for both of us. You remember my telling you last Monday about my accidental meeting with Mr. Aglionby of Scar Foot, my grandfather. On Wednesday last he died. They telegraphed for me to attend the funeral. He was buried this morning, and on his will being read, it turns out that he has left the whole of his property to me. I was astonished, I own, and in a measure gratified; one naturally is gratified at finding oneself suddenly rich when one had least reason to expect to be anything of the kind.

'But there are shades to the picture, and

drawbacks to the advantages, and you, my dear Lizzie, with your tender heart, will easily understand when I explain that my joy is not unmixed. It seems that the Mrs. Conisbrough whom I told you about, and who lives with her daughters at Yoresett, the market-town, had always been given to understand that she would inherit the property.

'My grandfather's will was made only the night before he died, in a fit of pique, for some reason which no one seems able to understand. They are entirely ignored—not even mentioned in it. Mrs. Conisbrough and her eldest daughter were present at the reading of the will. The poor lady has taken it very much to heart: her means are exceedingly small, and she thinks the will a most unjust one. (So do I, for that matter—an egregiously unjust will.) And she threatens to dispute it. She will have no chance, of course, but I feel my hands in a measure tied until I know the worst she can

do, and until some compromise is come to for her benefit. Meantime, she is ill upstairs in this very house! her agitation having brought on an attack of the heart. She is attended by her daughter, for whom I feel very sorry. I feel sorry for them all. They are gentlewomen, and evidently have had a hard struggle all their lives.

'There is such a sad, patient, yet dignified expression upon Miss Conisbrough's face. She cannot but command respect and admira tion. I wish you knew her. One dreams fast sometimes, and since this morning I have been dreaming of you settled here, and myself, having effected a compromise with Mrs. Conisbrough, and proved to her that I am not the rapacious upstart she takes me for—and of you and the Misses Conisbrough getting on very well together, and being great friends. I think this is not so foolish as most dreams. I see no reason why it should not come true. Miss Conisbrough is as far as possible from being forbidding,

though she looks so grave, and I am sure your winning ways would soon make her love you.

'This is a most beautiful old place—very different from the din and dust of the town. To-morrow I must try to make a little sketch of the lake and the house, and send you them. As soon as I can snatch the time, I shall run over to Irkford and see you, and discuss future plans. I can hardly realise yet that our wedding, which we thought must wait for so many years, need not now be long deferred—no longer than a certain wilful young woman chooses to put it off.

'Remember me to your mother; and Heaven bless you, my own darling, is the wish of your faithful sweetheart,

'BERNARD AGLIONBY.'

His heart warmed as he wrote the words, and thought of his beautiful Lizzie, and cherished his little plan of making her and the Misses Conisbrough into great friends.

Poor Bernard! He wrote out of the innocence and the fulness of his heart, not out of his knowledge of either men or women.

He had chosen to remain at Scar Foot rather than accept Mr. Whaley's invitation that he would return with him to Yoresett and be his guest. Mr. Whaley may easily be pardoned for not having surmised for a moment, what Aglionby's demeanour certainly did not suggest, the unspoken impulse which urged him to remain—the longing which lay deep at his heart, to become better acquainted, in silence and undisturbed, with this old place where his fathers had lived, and where now he was to live after them; to imbibe, as it were, some ideas of the life, of the home, that was to be his. Unspoken though it was, the sentiment, the desire, was there. Deep down in his rough heart, and crusted over with the bitterness which with him came too readily to the surface, there were wells of something very like romance and sentiment. Since this morning a thousand schemes

had come crowding into his mind, a thousand not wholly selfish plans and purposes, which now he could carry out to his heart's content. All his poetic instincts had been cramped, if not warped, by the life he had led, but under his unpromising exterior they were there—they did exist ; and it was they and they alone which had prompted him to refuse Mr. Whaley's invitation.

His sleep, on that first night that he rested under this roof, was sweet and undisturbed. When Sunday morning dawned, and he awoke, he at first could not imagine where he was, so profound was the silence, except for the chirping birds and the smothered rush of the brook at the back of the house. Gradually his senses returned to him. He remembered it all, sprang out of bed, went to the window, and lifted the blind.

The air of the October morning was sharp; the sun was brilliant, the atmosphere clear; the view before him struck with a strange thrill upon him—a thrill half-pleasure, half-

pain. The clear moors just opposite; the dimmer forms of the great fells behind them; the glittering silver surface of the little lake; the garden just under his eyes, filled with homely flowers, and with the green field beyond, sloping down to the water's edge—it was, indeed, very fair for anyone who had eyes to see! But to him it was more—it was a revelation; there was the peculiar stillness of a country Sunday morning over it all; it was the end of the world. Most of us are acquainted with one sensation—that of arriving when it is dark at some sea-side place—of sleeping soundly all night; of awakening the next morning, and on looking out, finding oneself confronted by the open sea. That is a sensation which never grows old or stale. Something of the thrill and joy which attends its first time of being experienced, hangs also about each recurrence of it.

It was with just such a sensation that Bernard Aglionby's eyes rested now on the prospect

before him. Vague, unconscious contrasts were formed in his mind—this place and that—Scar Foot on a Sunday morning, and 13, Crane Street, on a Sunday morning! He opened the window, and inhaled the pure, frosty, fragrant air—Arcadian air. It was very early, he found, not yet six o'clock; but going to bed again was a thing not to be thought of; and he dressed, went downstairs, and out of doors, and walked to the lake-side with the feeling that he was in a dream. It was as wonderful to him, and certainly quite as agreeable, as her first ball to a girl of seventeen who has been brought up in strict seclusion. He wondered at the intensity of his own enjoyment, and its *naïveté*.

'It is hereditary, I suppose,' he thought, 'and I can't help it. It's the stock I come of. When a man's forefathers have lived and moved and had their being for hundreds of years in a spot like this, and have appreciated it, a love of such things must be implanted

in that man's nature at his birth. So it is with me, I suppose. I fear Lizzie won't delight in it as I do.'

Bernard spent almost the whole of that day out-of-doors, literally 'exploring' with the avidity and the interest of a schoolboy who has found a promising place for birds'-nests. He walked completely round the lake, and thus, from under the village of Busk at the opposite side, he got a fine view of Scar Foot, and gazed at it till he could gaze no longer.

He met a farmer's boy, and asked him the names of some of the great grey fells in the distance, and the boy told him, and added that there must have been rain in Lancashire, for 'look at t' Stake,' which, as Bernard saw, was flecked with irregular white lines. 'All the becks is oot,' added the boy, and Aglionby smiled. At Irkford—for miles around Irkford—the 'becks' were black as ink, and foul as only the streams of a town can be with all manner of pollution.

He went in again, to his dinner, in the middle of the day, and sent a message by Mrs. Aveson to inquire after 'those ladies.' The answer brought by the housekeeper was, 'Miss Conisbrough's compliments, and she was quite well; but Mrs. Conisbrough was rather poorly this morning.' On her own account, Mrs. Aveson added that Mrs. Conisbrough was terribly weak, and had to lie on her back as still as a mouse, or palpitations would come on again. Dr. Lowther had called, and said that complete rest was still necessary. Miss Conisbrough had been reading the Morning Service to her mamma, and she was going to have her dinner with her upstairs.

With this he had to be satisfied. Then, after dinner, he sat at the open window of the parlour for an hour or two smoking, and making believe to read a county newspaper, with which Mrs. Aveson had supplied him; but it was as if a spell drew him out-of-doors, and he again set out for what he in-

tended to be a short walk, but on what developed into a long, aimless ramble over hill and dale: he got by mistake on to the road which leads to the great waterfall at Hardraw Scar, which was thundering in indescribable splendour, hurling itself over the rocky ledge into its deep and dark and fearful basin below.

Then he climbed a long road, over some great hills; discovered some vast and awful-looking 'pots,' crevasses of limestone, sinking for unknown depths into the ground—fearsome places indeed, bearing the unromantic title of 'Butter-tubs;' and a little farther on, found himself just beneath bleak Shunner Fell, gazing down into dark Swaledale, and in full view of such a 'tumultuous waste of huge hill-tops' as he had never seen before. Then he thought it was time to return, and retraced his steps downwards, and by the light of the moon, homewards.



CHAPTER III.

'GODEN ABEND, GODE NACHT!'

HE crossed the farmyard and went into the garden, under the old archway, and then, just as he was about to enter, he heard a voice singing, and was arrested. The window of the large room on the right was open, and a glow of firelight warmed the background. From it came the sound of a piano being played, and of a woman's voice accompanying it. Aglionby trod softly up to the window and looked in. The fire burnt merrily. Judith Conisbrough sat at the piano, with her back to him, softly playing; her voice had ceased,

and presently the music ceased also. Then she began again, and sang in a contralto voice, sweet, natural, and strong, if uncultivated, a song which Aglionby was surprised to hear. He would not have expected her to sing foreign songs—if this could be called foreign. He folded his arms upon the window-ledge and gazed in and listened, and the music, after all the other strange and dreamful incidents of that day, sank into his inmost soul.

> 'Oever de stillen Straten,
> Geit klar de Glockenslag.
> God' Nacht! Din Hart will slapen;
> Un' Morgen is oock een Dag.
>
> Din Kind liggt in de Wegen,
> Un' ik bin oock bi' Di';
> Din Sorgen un' Din Leven
> Sind allens um uns bi'.
>
> Noch eenmal lat uns spräken;
> Goden Abend, gode Nacht;
> Di Maand schient up' de Däken,
> Uns Herrgott hält de Wacht.'*

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* 'Clear sounds adown the silent street
The bell that tells the hours.

Aglionby was not a sentimental man, but he was a man intensely sensitive to simple pathos of any kind. None could jeer more cruelly at every pretence of feeling, but none had a keener appreciation of the real thing when it came in his way, And this little German dialect song is brimming over in every line with the truest pathos. Sung in these surroundings by Judith Conisbrough's rich and pathetic voice, her own sadness heavy upon her and in her heart, it was simply perfect, and Bernard knew it. Like a flash of lightning, while the tears rushed to

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Good-night! Thy very heart sleep deep!
 To-morrow is also ours.

Thy child within its cradle sleeps,
 And I am by thy side.
Thy life—its cares, and hopes, and loves
 Around thee all abide.

Again the words of peace we'll speak,
 "Good-even, love, good-night."
Each quiet roof the moonbeams streak,
 Our Lord God holds the watch.'

his eyes at this song, he remembered last Sunday evening, and Miss Vane warbling of how they had 'sat *by* the river, *you* and *I*,' and he shuddered.

There was a long pause, as she laid her hands on her lap, a long pause, and a deep sigh. Then she slowly rose. Aglionby's impulse was to steal away unobserved, even as he had stolen there, but he feared to lose sight of her; he longed to speak to her, to have her speak to him; to tell her, if she would listen to him, something of the pure delight he had this day experienced. So he said, still leaning into the room:

'May I thank you, Miss Conisbrough?'

He saw that she started, though scarce perceptibly; then she closed the piano, and turned towards him.

'Have you been listening to my singing? I hope it did not annoy you. It was for mamma. It soothes her.'

'Annoy me!' he echoed in a tone of deep mortification. 'You must take me for a

barbarian. It did even more than you intended. It soothed *me.* Perhaps you grudge me that?'

'Oh no!' said Judith, calmly. 'I am glad if it gave you any pleasure.'

She stood not far from the window, but did not approach it. Inside, the firelight glowed, and threw out the lines of her noble figure and shabby dress, and flickered upon her calm, sad, yet beautiful face.

'Are you going upstairs just because I have appeared upon the scene?' he asked, with a slight vibration in his voice. 'You have ignored me all day, now you are about to fly my presence. You certainly snub me sufficiently, Miss Conisbrough.'

Judith at last came nearer to the window, and held out her hand, which he took with a feeling of gratitude.

'I think you are very ready to invent motives for people's conduct,' she said, 'and those motives most extraordinary ones. I was not even thinking of going upstairs. I was

going into the other room to have my supper, at Mrs. Aveson's orders.'

'Were you?' exclaimed he, with animation. 'Then, if you will allow me, I will come and have mine at the same time, for I feel very hungry.'

'As you like,' replied Judith, and if there was no great cordiality in her tone, equally there was no displeasure—she spoke neutrally.

Bernard hastened to the front-door, and met her crossing the passage.

'I think we had better fasten it,' he remarked. 'It is growing dark.'

'We have no thieves in these parts,' said Judith, a little scarcastically.

'But there is the cold,' he replied, with a townsman's horror of open doors after dusk; and he shut it, and followed her into the house-place where this evening the supper-table was laid.

Judith walked to the fireplace, and stood

with her hand resting against the mantelpiece. She looked pale and tired.

'Have you been out to-day?' he asked.

'No. I have been with mamma. She was nervous, and afraid to be left.'

'I have been out of doors almost the whole day,' he said.

'Have you? Exploring, I suppose?'

'Yes, I have been exploring. It is a beautiful place, to me especially, who have been all my life cooped up in streets and warehouses. I dare say you can scarcely believe it, but I have hardly seen any country. My mother was always too poor to take me away—allow me!'

Judith looked up quickly, as he uttered these words, and placed a chair for her at the table. She laid her hand on the chair-back, as she said:

'But you had friends who were wealthy, had you not—other relations?'

'My grandfather, Mr. Aglionby, was my only rich relation.'

'But your mother—Mrs. Ralph Aglionby—had rich relations, I think.'

'If she had, I never heard of them. Indeed, I know she had none. Her relations were very few, and such as they were, were all as poor as herself. Her sister, Mrs. Bryce, is the only one who is left. She is a good woman, but she is not rich—far from it.'

'Then I was mistaken,' said Judith, in so exceedingly quiet a tone that he said abruptly, as he did most things:

'I really beg your pardon for boring you with such histories. Here is the supper. May I give you some of this cold beef?'

He helped her, and noticed again how pale her face was, how sad her expression. He poured her out some wine, and insisted upon her drinking it. Every moment that he spent with her deepened the feeling with which she had from the first inspired him—one of admiration. In her presence he felt

more genial, more human and hopeful. He scarce recognised himself.

As for Judith, the simple question she had put, respecting his rich relations, and the answer he had given her, had filled her mind with forebodings. A dim, dread suspicion was beginning to take shape and form in her brain, to grow into something more than a suspicion. As yet, though it was there, she dreaded to admit it, even to herself. She had a high courage, but not high enough yet to give definite shape to that which still she knew, and which oppressed and tormented her. She must never speak of it. If she could prove herself to be wrong, what terrible repentance and humiliation she would have to go through; if right—but no! It could not be that she would be right.

At the present moment, she strove to put down these feelings, and exert herself to be at least civil to this young man who had so strangely stepped into her life, whom she had already begun to study with interest, and

who, if her as yet unformulated suspicions should prove to be true, was one whom she could never know on terms of cordiality or friendship, even though all he said and did went to prove that he was no bragging heir, no odious hectorer over that which had suddenly become his.

'Were you at church this morning?' she asked.

'I?' He looked up quickly. 'No. Ought I to have been?'

'I really don't know. Perhaps you are not a churchman?'

'I am not. And I suppose that almost everyone here is.'

'Yes; I think that all the gentry go to church, and most of the working people too.'

'Miserable black sheep that I am! I realise from your simple question, that I ought to have presented myself, in the deepest mourning——'

'Mr. Aglionby,' she interrupted, almost hastily, 'pardon me, but you speak of your

grandfather as if you felt some kind of contempt for him.'

'Not contempt, but I should lie most horribly if I pretended to admire, or even to respect him. I do consider that he showed himself hard and pitiless in his deeds towards me during his lifetime, and that finally he behaved towards Mrs. Conisbrough with a cruelty that was malignant. And I can't respect a man who behaves so.'

'But it was not so,' said Judith, pushing her plate away from her, clasping her hands on the edge of the table, and looking intently at him.

'Not so?' He paused in the act of raising his glass to his lips, and looked at her intently in his turn, in some surprise. 'I don't understand you.'

'I cannot explain. It sounds odd to you, no doubt. But I have reason to think that when you accuse my grand-uncle of vindictiveness and injustice, and then of malignant cruelty, you are wrong—you are indeed.

He was passionate. He did all kinds of things on impulse, and if he believed himself wronged, he grew wild under the wrong, and then he could do things that were harsh, and even brutal. But he was not one of those who cherish a grudge, He was generous. His anger was short-lived——'

'My dear Miss Conisbrough,' said Bernard, with his most chilling smile upon his lips, his coldest gleam in his eyes, 'it is most delightful to find what generosity of mind *you* are possessed of—and also, what simplicity. But don't you think you appeal more to my credulity than to my common-sense, when you affirm what you do—and expect me to believe it? Have I not the experience of my whole lifetime? have I not my poor mother's ruined life and premature death from grief and anxiety, to judge from? And did I not only yesterday hear the will read, which has brought on your mother's illness?'

He tried not to speak mockingly, but the conviction of Judith's intense simplicity was

too strong for him. The mockery sounded in his voice, and gleamed in his eyes.

'If I were in my usual crabbed temper,' he added more genially, 'I should say that you were quixotic and foolish.'

'No, I am neither generous, quixotic, nor foolish. I told you I could not explain. All I can say is, that when I hear you speak in that half-sneering, half-angry tone of him, I feel—I cannot tell you what I feel.'

'Then I am sure you shall never feel it again. I promise you that, and I beg your pardon, if I have wounded you,' he said earnestly, and, hoping to turn away her attention from that topic, he added:

'But you said something about going to church. Do you think the neighbours expected me to be at church this morning, instead of rambling round the lake, and talking about the fells with the farmers' boys?'

'I dare say people would be a little surprised, especially as it was the day after Mr.

Aglionby's funeral. These small places, you see——'

'Have their unwritten law, which is very stringent. Yes, I know. I ought to have gone. I would have done, if I had thought of it.'

'Are you a dissenter?' asked Judith, 'because there is a chapel—Methodist, I think—at Yoresett, and a Quakers' meeting-house at Bainbeck.'

'I am not what you would call a dissenter, I suppose, but a freethinker: what it is now fashionable to call an Agnostic—a modish name for a very old thing.'

'Agnostic—that means a person who does not know, doesn't it?'

'Yes. At least, with me, it does. It means that I acknowledge and confess my utter and profound ignorance of all things outside experience, beyond the grave; beyond what science can tell me.'

'But that is—surely that is atheism—rank materialism, isn't it?'

'Scarcely, I think, is it? Because I don't presume, or pretend to say that those things which believers preach do not exist—all those things in the beyond, of which they so confidently affirm the existence—I do not deny it; I merely say that for me such things are veiled in a mystery which I cannot penetrate, and which I do not believe that any other man has the power to penetrate. My concern is with this life, and this life alone. I have a moral law quite outside those questions.'

'Have you? Then you do affirm some things?'

'One thing, very strongly,' he answered, with a slight smile, 'a thing which partly agrees, and partly disagrees, with what you affirm—I am supposing you to be a Christian.'

'And what is that?' asked Judith, neither affirming nor denying her Christianity.

'This: that to use the words of the Old Testament, "The sins of the fathers shall be visited upon the children unto the third and

fourth generation," ay, and a good deal beyond that; and that, in our system of belief or disbelief—whichever you like to call it—there exists *no* forgiveness of sins. That is all. It is not an elaborate creed, but I think any one who really comprehends it and accepts it, will find that he must lead a life, to come up to its spirit, as stern and as pure as that which any system of theism can offer to him,'

'*No* forgiveness of sins,' faltered Judith, more struck, apparently, by his words than seemed reasonable. 'That is surely a hard lesson. Not even by repentance?'

He shook his head. 'I don't see how even repentance can bring forgiveness,' he said. '"The soul that sinneth, it shall die," and "The wages of sin is death." There is no getting out of it, is there? The man who leads a sinful life does not do it with impunity, I think. If he seems to escape pretty well himself, look at his children—his children's children. Look at the punish-

ments that are transmitted from generation unto generation " of them that hate me and despise my commandments." '

'That is God,' said Judith.

'I know you call it so. To me it means the laws of science and nature: reason, morality, righteousness, clean hands and a pure heart.'

'And you think that would be sufficient to deter people from doing wrong and wicked things?' she asked, still with an absorption of interest in the theme which surprised him, for after all it was a very old and hackneyed one—a subject which has been disputed thousands of times, and he had certainly not thrown any new light upon it by his words.

'I do not know,' said he, 'I am an Agnostic there, too. It is to be hoped that if it were not efficacious now—which it hardly would be, I dare say—it may become so in the course of time, as the world grows what I call wiser, what you denominate more scep-

tical, I suppose. At any rate the fact remains, which no theologian can deny, that the sins of the fathers *are* visited upon the children daily, hourly, inevitably; and that if a man wish his descendants to escape punishment—if he wish to escape it himself—he must walk circumspectly: he can't be a drunkard or a profligate all his life, and by repenting on his death-bed wipe out all the consequences to himself and others; despite all that is preached about its being never too late to mend, and never too late to be forgiven, he cannot do it. He has sinned, and the effects are there. Surely you will own that?'

'It cannot be denied.'

'Well, and a man or a woman cannot live a dishonest life—cannot go on with a lie in their right hands—without consequences ensuing. They may repent, sooner or later, in dust and ashes, and may swear, like Falstaff, to eschew sack and live cleanly, but it takes two, at any rate, to tell a lie or to act

one: the effects spread out in rings—none can know where or how they will end. It cannot be escaped. Some one must be punished.'

'Then those who come after—is it of no use for them to try to expiate the sins of their fathers?' she asked, with the same anxious, eager intentness; 'or, would it not be natural and right for them to say, "Since my parents left me with this blight in my life, I'll even live recklessly. No repentance will cure it. There is no justice. I will get what pleasure I can out of my maimed existence, and the future may look after itself?' "

'I told you the creed was a hard one,' he said. 'We have no God of mercy to go on our knees to, for forgiveness. What we have sowed, we must reap, God or no God. It is open to us to do as you say—"Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow thou shalt die." Or, it is open to you to take your stand as firmly as may be, to *do without* the cakes and ale; to say, "Whatever I may suffer for my

parents' sin, none shall have to suffer for mine," and to live righteously.'

'And the reward?' asked Judith, looking at him eagerly and intently, even anxiously.

'There is no reward, that I know of, except the one which Christianity says is not sufficient to keep a man straight—the conviction that you have done right and been honest, cost what it might, and that whatever you have suffered from others, no others shall suffer by you. That is all that I know of.'

'Then do you recommend this creed to others?'

'I recommend it simply as I would recommend truth, or what appeared to me to be truth, before a lie—as I would recommend a man setting out on a journey to fill his wallet with dry bread, or even dry crusts, rather than with macaroons and cream-cakes.'

She leaned her head on her hand, in silence, and at last said:

'It is a hard doctrine.'

'Yes, I know. It is the only one that I ever found of any service to me in my life.'

'It seems to me that it might be good for strong spirits, but that it would altogether crush weak ones.'

'Then, Miss Conisbrough, it should be good for yours; it should be the very meat to sustain it,' said Bernard, involuntarily and eagerly.

Judith smiled, rather wanly.

'You imagine mine to be a strong spirit?' she asked.

'I am convinced of it.'

'You never were more mistaken in your life. I am a faint-hearted coward.' She rose slowly, and paused near the fire. 'I think, Mr. Aglionby, that there is a great deal of reason in your agnosticism. I wish people—some people, I mean—had known of it and realised it a long time ago.'

There was a dreary hopelessness in her tone, a blank sorrow in her expression, which went home to him. Like many a strong soul

which has been scarred in battle, he shrank from seeing others exposed to the ordeal he had gone through. He thought she was going, all desolate as she was and looked. He could not endure the idea of sending her comfortless away, and he strove to detain her yet another moment.

'Do you mean,' he hastily asked, and in a low voice—'do you mean about my grand-father? Because, you know, I try to live up to my convictions. He did wrong, I know —and those who come after him must suffer from it more or less; but I have elected to take the side of not letting others suffer by me, and——'

'I was not thinking of my great-uncle at all,' was the unexpected reply. 'You are harping on the way in which he has left his money. And you would like to make it right. You cannot. I never realised until now, how utterly impossible it is. Yes, the sins of the fathers *shall* be visited upon the children. But you have committed no sin.

Do not trouble yourself. If it were merely money—though I am nearly a pauper, I never felt to care so little for money as I do now. It seems to me to make so little difference. I think I shall try your creed, Mr. Aglionby ; it seems to me to be a manly one.' She held out her hand.

'But you want a womanly one,' he urged eagerly, yet not too boldly.

'No ; I want as strong, as manly, as virile a creed as I can find. I want a stick to lean upon that will not fail me, and I believe you have extended it to me this night, though I will not deny that it has a rough and horny feeling to the hand. Good-night.'

'I am greatly concerned——' he began, and his face, his voice, and his eyes all showed that concern to be profound.

'Do not be concerned. I thank you for it,' said Judith, smiling for the first time upon him. Aglionby hardly knew what the feeling was which seemed to strike like a blow upon his heart, as he met that smile, exquisitely

sweet and attractive, like most smiles of grave faces. He could not speak a word, for the emotion was altogether new to him. Passively he allowed her to withdraw her hand, and to walk out of the room.

He sat with his elbow on his knee, his chin in his hand, gazing into the fire, and would have sat there till the fire had expired, had not Mrs. Aveson at last wonderingly looked in to ask if he had finished supper.

'Yes,' he answered abruptly, and the words of the song came tenderly into his mind:

'Noch eenmal lat uns spräken,
Goden Abend, gode Nacht.
Di Maand schient up de Däken
Uns Herrgott hält de Wacht.'





CHAPTER IV.

DANESDALE GOES TO SCAR FOOT.

ABOUT noon the next day, Sir Gabriel Danesdale and his son, riding down the hill behind Scar Foot, left off a lively discussion on politics, which had hitherto engrossed them, and turned their thoughts and their conversation towards the house which had just come in sight.

'I wonder how we shall like him,' observed Sir Gabriel. 'At the funeral, I took good notice of him—you were not there.'

'No, I don't go to them, on principle.'

'That is a mistake,' said his father; 'there

is never any harm in occasionally confronting in another, what must sometime be one's own latter end. When I fairly realised that it was old John who was being laid under the ground there, my own contemporary, and the friend of my youth, I assure you that the things of this present, the roast and the boiled, the lands and the houses, seemed to shrink away into remarkably small compass. It puts things before one in another light.'

Sir Gabriel spoke with a tempered cheerfulness, and Randulf replied :

'I never thought of it in that way ; I have no doubt you are right.'

'You are young, it is no wonder you have never thought of it in that way. But, as I was saying, I took remarkably good notice of this young fellow, and it was strongly borne in upon my mind that if he and old John had been much together, the roof of Scar Foot must have flown off under the violence of their disputes. He is not one of us, Randulf ;

not one of my kind, though he may suit your new-fangled notions.'

'Did he look like a gentleman?'

'Upon my word, I can hardly tell. Not a finished gentleman, though he had some of his grandfather's pride of bearing. But everything about him tells of the town, any-one would have picked him out as belonging to a different world from ours.'

'Are you obliged to call upon him?' asked the young man.

'No, I suppose not, but I choose to do so, though I am sorry for Mrs. Conisbrough and her daughters. If I find the fellow is amen-able to influence, I shall let him see that the whole place would approve of his sharing his inheritance with them.'

'I hope you won't burn your fingers,' said his son, sceptically. 'For my part I am very glad not to have made the acquaintance of this redoubtable "old John," for, from all I can hear, he seems to have been a most odious

character, and to have behaved disgracefully to these ladies.'

'Well, I'm afraid there is not much to be said for him, in that respect; but after all, a son is a son, Randulf, and I can pardon a man almost anything when it is done for a son, or a son's son.'

Randulf made no answer. He had been glancing aside, occupied in looking for the spot where he had found Judith Conisbrough, weeping. He had seen and recognised it, and with the sight of it came the remembrance of her face. Unknown 'sons and son's sons' appeared to him insignificant in comparison with a woman whose sorrow he had beheld, and whose individuality had profoundly impressed him. They rode into the courtyard, at the back of the house.

'I hope he won't be away,' said Sir Gabriel, with an earnestness which amused his son. 'It has been an effort to me to come, and I don't want to have made it for nothing.'

He pulled a bell, and while they waited for a man to come, Judith Conisbrough walked into the courtyard, having come from the front part of the house. Neither Sir Gabriel nor his son knew of the presence at Scar Foot of Mrs. Conisborough and her daughter, and were therefore proportionately surprised to see her there. She was going past them, with a bow; but Sir Gabriel, quickly dismounting, shook hands with her, and wished her good-day. She gravely returned his greeting.

'Are you—are you staying here?' he asked, at a loss to account for her presence.

'I am, at present, with my mother, who was unfortunately taken ill here, on Saturday.'

'Dear, dear! I'm sorry to hear that. Then I fear we shall not find Mr. Aglionby at home?'

'He is at Scar Foot—Mr. Bernard Aglionby. Whether he is now in the house, or not, I have not the least idea,' replied Judith, composedly.

'Ah! I hope Mrs. Conisbrough is not seriously ill,' pursued Sir Gabriel, uncomfortably conscious that the young lady looked careworn and sad, and with a sudden sense that there might be more circumstances in the whole case than they knew of, complications which they had not heard of.

'No, thank you. I hope she will be well enough to be moved in a day or two. She is subject to such attacks. As you are going to see Mr. Aglionby, I will not detain you any longer.'

She bowed to both father and son, and was moving on. Randulf's horse had been taken. He returned Miss Conisbrough's bow, and made a step after his father, in the direction of the house. Then, suddenly turning on his heel, he overtook Judith, raised his hat, and held out his hand.

'You looked so stern, Miss Conisbrough, that at first I thought I had better go after my papa, and not say anything to you, but—

see, allow me to open this gate for you, if you are going this way—are you ?'

'Yes,' replied Judith, repressing a smile, 'but if you are going to call upon Mr. Aglionby, do you not think you had better follow Sir Gabriel ?'

'Directly—no hurry; I never expected I should have the good-fortune to meet you, or I should have ridden here more cheerfully. My father was wondering how we should get on with this man here. You know, he has the kindest heart in the world, has my father; he thinks Mrs. Conisbrough has been treated badly. There!' as Judith's face flushed painfully. 'I have said the thing I ought not to have said, and offended you.'

'No, you have not, but I think we had better not talk about it,'

'Well, we won't,' said Randulf, deliberately pursuing the subject. 'But everybody knows that the aged r—raascal who lived here——'

'Hush, hush, Mr. Danesdale!'

'I beg your pardon—he behaved scandal-

ously to Mrs. Conisbrough. Have you had speech with this new man? What is he like? Is he horrible?'

'Oh no! He—I like him.'

Randulf was scrutinising her from under his sleepy eyelids. After this answer, he did not pursue the subject further. Judith asked him to open the gate, and let her go for her walk. He did so, and added, with a slower drawl than usual, 'and, Miss Conisbrough, how is your s—sister?'

'Which sister?' asked Judith, surveying him straitly from her large and candid eyes.

'Your sister Delphine,' answered Randulf, leaning on the gate in a leisurely manner, as if he never meant to lift himself off it again.

'I have not seen her since Saturday. I had a note from her this morning, though—I want her to meet me. I won't have her come here; and that reminds me,' she added, 'that I want to find Toby, the farm boy, to take me a message——'

'I am going home that way. Couldn't you intrust the message to me?'

'I'm afraid it would be a bore,' said Judith, who perhaps saw as clearly out of her open eyes, as did Randulf from his half-closed ones.

'I never offer to do things that are a bore,' he assured her.

'Well, if you really don't object, I should be very glad if you would call and tell her that if it is fine this afternoon, she must set off at half-past two, and I will do the same, and we shall meet at Counterside, just half-way. I want very much to speak to her, but you can understand that I don't care to ask anyone into this house, unless I am obliged, nor to send Mr. Aglionby's servants on my errands.'

'So you employ your own most devoted retainer instead,' said Randulf composedly, but unable to repress a smile of gratification. 'I will deliver the message faithfully. Now the gate stands open. Good-morning.'

Judith passed out at the gate, and Randulf hastened after Sir Gabriel, the smile still hovering about his lips, and inwardly saying, 'I'm glad I turned back. It was a good stroke of business, after I'd racked my brains for an excuse to call there, without being able to find one.'

Mrs. Aveson received him with a smile and words of welcome, and ushered him into the state parlour where already his father and Aglionby were together.

Certainly more strongly contrasted characters could hardly have been found, than the three then assembled in the parlour at Scar Foot. Each, too, was fully conscious of his unlikeness to the other. There was a necessary constraint over the interview. Sir Gabriel spoke in high terms of the late squire. The late squire's successor listened in courteous, cool silence, bowing his head now and then, and smiling slightly in a manner which the candid Sir Gabriel could not be expected

to understand. Aglionby did not protest, when this incense was burnt at the shrine of his grandfather, neither did he for one moment join in the ceremony. When, however, Sir Gabriel remarked that Mr. Aglionby had been hasty and inconsiderate sometimes, the new-comer rejoined, 'I am quite sure of it,' in a voice which carried conviction. Then Sir Gabriel remarked that he supposed Mr. Aglionby had not lived much in the country.

'My fame seems to have preceded me, in that respect,' replied Aglionby, laughing rather sarcastically. After which Sir Gabriel felt rather at a loss what to say to this dark-looking person, who knew nothing of the country, and cared nothing for country-gentlemen's pursuits, who could not even converse sympathetically about the man from whom he had inherited his fortune. Mrs. Conisbrough was a tabooed subject to Sir Gabriel. And he had just begun to feel embarrassed, when Randulf came in, and

afforded an opportunity for introducing a new topic, and a powerful auxiliary in the matter of keeping up the conversation, for which his father could not feel sufficiently thankful. He introduced the young men to each other, and Randulf apologised for his tardy appearance.

'I wanted to speak to Miss Conisbrough!' he said, 'and stopped with her longer than I meant to. She had an errand for me, too, so I stayed to hear what it was.'

'It seems to me that you and Miss Conisbrough get on very well together,' observed his father, good-naturedly.

Bernard sat silent during this colloquy. What could Judith Conisbrough or her friends possibly be to him? Had he not Lizzie at Irkford? His for ever! Yet his face grew a little sombre as he listened.

'Do we, sir? Well, it is but a week to-day since I made her acquaintance, but I think that any man who didn't get on with her and her sisters—well, he wouldn't deserve to.

Don't you?' he added, turning to Aglionby, and calmly ignoring the possibility of any awkwardness in the topic.

'I know only Miss Conisbrough, and that slightly,' said Bernard, very gravely. 'She seems to me a most—charming——'

'You are thinking that charming isn't the word, and it is not,' said Randulf. 'If one used such expressions about one's acquaintances in these days, I should say she was a noble woman. That's my idea of her: exalted, you know, in character, and all that sort of thing.'

'I should imagine it; but I know very little of her,' said Aglionby, who, however, felt his heart respond to each one of these remarks.

Sir Gabriel found this style of conversation dull. He turned to Aglionby, and said, politely:

'I believe you have always lived at Irkford, have you not?'

'Yes,' responded Bernard, with a look of

humour in his eyes. 'I was in a warehouse there. I sold grey cloth.'

'Grey cloth,' murmured Sir Gabriel, polite, but puzzled.

'Grey cloth—yes. It is not an exciting, nor yet a very profitable employment. It seems, however, that if my rich relation had not suddenly remembered me, I might have continued in it to the end of my days.'

'Rich relation?' began Sir Gabriel; 'I thought——'

'That I had others, perhaps?' suggested Bernard; while Randulf listened with half-closed eyes, and apparently without hearing what was said.

'Well, I certainly have a vague impression—I may be quite wrong—I suppose I must be.'

'It is an odd thing that Miss Conisbrough also accused me of having rich relations the other day,' said Bernard, and then carelessly changed the subject.

The guests sat a little longer. The conversation was almost entirely between

Aglionby and Sir Gabriel; but secretly the young men also measured one another with considerable eagerness, and the conclusion left in the mind of each concerning the other was, 'I don't dislike him—there is good stuff in him.'

At last they rose to go, and with wishes on the Danesdales' side to see more of Mr. Aglionby, and promises on his part to return their visit, they departed.

Bernard looked at his watch, paused, considered, muttered to himself, 'Of course it is all right;' and ringing the bell, asked Mrs. Aveson if Miss Conisbrough were out, and if she had said whether she was coming in to dinner.

'She went out for a walk towards Dale Head, sir, and she didn't say when she would be back,' responded Mrs. Aveson.

'Thank you,' said Aglionby, and with that he went out, and by a strange coincidence, his steps, too, turned in the direction of Dale Head.

But he was not successful in meeting Miss Conisbrough (if that were the intention with which he set out). He saw no trace of her, though, as he passed along the beautiful road, catching occasional glimpses, here and there, of the lake, his lips parted involuntarily now and then, in the desire to utter to some companion shadow what he thought of it all.

But it is thin work, talking to shadows, as he felt. He returned home, found that Miss Conisbrough had come in, and was going to dine with him, and that a messenger who had been to Yoresett, had brought him a letter from the post-office of that metropolis, addressed, in a sprawling hand, to Bernard Aglionby, Esq. Rapture! It was from Lizzie!





CHAPTER V.

LOOKING FORWARD.

AFTER she had said good-morning to Randulf, Judith walked along the rough, stony lane, with its gaps in the hedge, showing the rugged fells in the distance, and her gaze had lost some of its despondency. Indeed, she felt cheered by the little interview.

She distinctly liked young Danesdale (though to her, old in care and sorrow, he seemed more like a very charming boy than a man grown, with a man's feelings), and she was conscious, with a keen thrill of sympathetic conviction, that he liked her, liked her

sisters, liked everything about her. It was a delightful sensation, like the coming of a sudden, unexpected joy in a sad life. She dwelt upon his words, his manner, his gestures, from the moment in which, with the languor gone from his eyes, he had overtaken her, to his last delighted expression about her sending her own devoted retainer on her messages, instead of Bernard Aglionby's servants. It was perhaps rather a cool thing to say—at least it might have savoured of impertinence if some people had said it. From Randulf Danesdale, it came agreeably and naturally enough.

She would see Delphine that afternoon—an interview for which she longed greatly; she had gratified Randulf by allowing him to give her message about the meeting, and Delphine would be pleased to learn her sister's wishes from such a courier. Altogether, things looked brighter.

She presently turned off to the right, into a little dell or gorge, and wandered along

some paths she knew, half-woodland, half-rocky. She had come out for her health's sake, but remembering the walk in prospect in the afternoon, did not stay very long, and was utterly unconscious that at one moment, just as she was standing beneath a faded beech-tree, whose foliage was yellow and sere, and holding in her hand some variously-tinted autumn leaves which she had picked, the footsteps which she heard in the road below, and not far distant, were those of Bernard Aglionby.

Returned to the house, she went to her mother's room, who still lay white and weak-looking, though free from pain and breathlessness, upon her bed.

'See, mamma, here are some lovely leaves, which I found in the clough this morning.'

She put them in a little glass, and placed them near her mother.

'Thank you, Judith. . . . . What were all those voices I heard below? I am sure I feel as if I ought to know them.'

'Sir Gabriel and Mr. Danesdale come to call upon Mr. Aglionby.'

'You do not mean it?' exclaimed Mrs. Conisbrough, with animation; and then, after a pause, 'Really to call upon him? To welcome him?'

'I suppose so, mamma. I don't know why else they should have come.'

'No doubt! "The king is dead: long live the king!" It would have been the same if we had been in possession,' said Mrs. Conisbrough, in an accent of indescribable bitterness.

Yet she had ceased to speak of Bernard with the passionate indignation and resentment which she had at first expressed. Perhaps reflection had convinced her that opposition would be folly. Perhaps—with women like Mrs. Conisbrough, many perhapses may have an influence.

'As you seem so much better, mother, I have asked Delphine to come to Counterside, and I shall go and meet her, so that we can

have a chat this afternoon. Then I can tell her how you really are.'

'As you like,' responded Mrs. Conisbrough, rather peevishly. 'I am aware that you and Delphine cannot exist apart, or think you cannot, for more than a day, without repining. In my young days, girls used to think less of themselves.'

'If you do not wish me to leave you, I will send word to Delphine not to come.'

'On no account stay in for me,' was the logical and consistent reply. 'The walk will do you good. Did you say you had seen Mr. Danesdale?'

'Yes. It is he who has promised to call at our house, and ask Delphine to meet me.'

'Ah, I see!' said Mrs. Conisbrough, in a tone so distinctly pleased and approving, that Judith could not but notice it.

She turned to her mother with parted lips, then, as if suddenly recollecting herself, closed them again, and took up her sewing,

at which she worked until Mrs. Aveson came to say that dinner was ready.

'Thank you. Is Mr. Aglionby going to dine now, do you know?'

'Yes, he is, Miss Judith. If you'd prefer me to bring yours up here——'

'Oh no, thank you. I am not afraid of him,' said Judith, with a slight smile.

'I should think not, Miss Judith. If there's any cause for fear, I should think it would be more likely on the other side.'

'Why, I wonder?' speculated Judith within herself, and her mother's voice came from the bed, as Mrs. Aveson withdrew.

'Just straighten your hair, Judith, and fasten your collar with my little gold brooch. It will make you look tidier.'

'I'll straighten my hair, mamma, but as for the brooch, I really don't think it is necessary. If you could see the careless, and I might say shabby, style in which Mr. Aglionby dresses, you would know that he did not think much about what people wear.'

She had made her beautiful brown hair quite smooth, and without further elaboration of her toilette, she went downstairs.

Bernard was standing in the dining-room waiting for her.

'Mrs. Aveson told me I was to have the pleasure of your company at dinner,' he said, with the graciousness and politeness which, when he was with her, seemed to spring more readily than other feelings within his breast.

'I am going out at half-past two,' answered Judith.

'Are you? and I at a quarter to three. I am going to Yoresett to see Mr. Whaley.'

'Indeed. I have a sort of message for you from mamma; she did not send it to you in so many words, but when I suggested it, she agreed with me, and that is, that after to-day I think we need not tax your kindness any further. My mother is so much better that I think she will be fit to go home.'

'Oh, do you think so? She must not on

any account move before she is quite able to do so without risk. I would not be in any hurry to remove her.'

'You are very good to say so. But if you will kindly allow us to have the brougham to-morrow afternoon——'

'I am sure you had better say the day after to-morrow. From what Dr. Lowther said, I am convinced of it. I—I don't think I can spare the brougham to-morrow afternoon, though I really wasn't aware that there was such a carriage on the premises, or anything about it. But I shall be sure to want it to-morrow afternoon.'

His dark eyes looked at her very pleasantly across the table, and there was a smile upon his lips, all playfulness, and no malice.

Judith met the glance, and thought:

'How *could* I have thought him hard and stony-looking? And if only all these miserable complications had not come in the way, what a very nice relation he would have been!'

But she said, aloud :

'You are very kind, and since you really wish it, I accept your offer gratefully. The day after to-morrow, then.'

'That is a much more sensible arrangement, though I call even that too soon. But I like to have my own way, and I have really got so little of it hitherto, that I dare say there is some danger of my using the privilege recklessly. However, since I have prevailed so far, I will see that all is ready at the time you wish. And—Miss Conisbrough ?'

'Yes ?'

'Do you think Mrs. Conisbrough will strongly object to my seeing her ?'

'You must not speak to her on any matters of money, or business,' said Judith, hastily.

'I had not the slightest intention of doing so, though I still hope that in time she will fall in with my views on the matter, and I hope, too, you have not forgotten your promise to help me in it.'

Judith said nothing. Her eyes were cast

down. Aglionby paused only for a moment, and then went on:

'What I meant was, that perhaps you would prefer—she might be very angry if I put in any appearance when she goes away. In plain words, do you think she still so strongly resents my presence here, that it would be unwise for me to pay my respects to her, and tell her how glad I am that she is better?'

'No,' said Judith, her face burning, her eyes fixed upon her plate. 'She has considered the matter while she has been ill. I think—I am sure you might speak to her, only please do not be offended if——'

'If she snubs me very severely,' said he, with a gleam of amusement. 'No, indeed, I will not. Whatever Mrs. Conisbrough may say to me, I will receive submissively and meekly.'

'Because you feel that the power is on your side,' said Judith rapidly, involuntarily, almost in a whisper, her face burning with a

still deeper blush. 'It must be easy to smile at a woman's petulance when you are a man, and feel that you have the game all in your own hands.'

She had not meant to say so much. The words had broken from her almost uncontrollably. Almost every hour since the moment in which she had seen her mother cower down before Bernard's direct gaze, her sense of his power and strength had been growing and intensifying. Hours of brooding and solitude, apart from her accustomed companions; long and painful meditations upon the past and present, and thrills of dread when she contemplated the future; these things, broken only by her two or three interviews with Bernard, and with him alone, had strengthened her feeling, until now, though she was neither dependent, clinging, nor servile by nature, the very sight of Aglionby's dark face, with its marked and powerful features, made her heart beat faster, and brought a crushing consciousness of his

strength and her own weakness. Had he been overbearing or imperious in manner, all her soul would have rebelled; she was one of those natures with whom justice and forbearance are almost a passion; the moments would have seemed hours until she could break free from his roof and his presence; but he was the very reverse of overbearing or imperious. The strength was kept in reserve; the manner was gentle and deferential—only she knew that the power was there, and she would not have been a woman if she had not had a latent idolatry of power. The combination of strength and gentleness was new to her; the proximity to a man who wielded these attributes was equally foreign to her, and all these things combined had begun to exercise over her spirit a fascination to which she was already beginning, half-unconsciously, to yield.

Aglionby's only answer at first to her remark was a look, slow and steady; but he had looks which sank into the souls of those

at whom they were levelled, and haunted them, and it was such a glance that he bestowed upon Judith Conisbrough now. Then he said :

'That remark shows me very plainly that "petulance," as you are pleased to call it, forms no part of *your* character ; but I guessed that some time ago. I am glad to have you on my side.'

Judith wondered whether he was saying these things on purpose to try her to the utmost. She was glad that at that moment she perceived, on looking at the clock, that she had only a few minutes in which to get ready, if she were to set off at the time she had appointed with Delphine. Making this an excuse, she rose.

'Are you walking ?' he asked. 'I am sure you ought not to walk so far.'

'Oh, thank you, I have been accustomed to it all my life,' said she, going out of the room, and slowly ascending the stairs.

'Child, you look quite flushed,' cried her

mother. 'What have you been doing? Quarrelling with Mr. Aglionby?'

'No, mother. It would be hard to quarrel with Mr. Aglionby. No one could be more considerate . . . but I wish we were at home again. By the way, he will not hear of your going until the day after to-morrow.'

'I shall be very glad of another day's rest. I feel dreadfully weak.'

Judith made no reply, but put on her things and went out, just as the big clock on the stairs notified that it was half-past two—that is, it said half-past three, as is the habit of clocks in country places—a habit which had perfectly bewildered Bernard, who had tried to get Mrs. Aveson to put it back, but had been met by the solemn assurance that any such course would result in the complete *bouleversement* of all the existing domestic arrangements. Indeed, he saw that the proposition excited unbounded alarm and displeasure in Mrs. Aveson's mind, and he had

to admit that in a Yorkshire dale one must do as the natives do.

It was a fine afternoon. Judith walked quickly along the well-known road, and in her mind she kept seeing Bernard's eyes directed to her face, after her own hurried remark about woman's petulance. She could not satisfy herself as to what that look meant, and sighed impatiently as she tried to banish it from her mind.

At last she came to the dip in the road, which, with its shade of overhanging trees, its quaint, nestling old houses and cottages, and tiny whitewashed Friends' Meeting House, was known as Countersett or Counterside. Half-way down the hill she saw something which banished egoistic reflections, and caused a smile to break out upon her face: a slim girl's figure, with the shabby old gown, which yet always looked graceful, and the thick twists of golden hair rolling from be neath the ancient brown straw-hat. That was no unusual sight, and her heart leaped

with joy as she beheld it; but the figure with that figure—not Rhoda's slender height, not her audacious, Irish-grey eyes and defiantly smiling young face—not a girl at all, but Randulf Danesdale. Surely there was nothing to laugh at, the meeting was a simple one enough; yet on the faces of all three as they met there was a broad irrepressible smile, which soon became a hearty laugh. Instead of saying anything, the three stood still in the wooded road, and laughed loud and clear—light-hearted laughs. The young people of the present day are generally too learned and careworn, too scientific or æsthetic, to laugh very heartily; but in some country districts there are still left a few rustics who can and do laugh loudly at nothing in particular.

It was Judith who first ceased to laugh, and said:

'Why are we behaving so absurdly? Surely there is nothing to laugh at!'

'Yes, there is,' said Delphine, her golden-

brown eyes dancing. 'There is Mr. Danesdale to laugh at.'

'Who is too happy to make himself useful in any way,' he murmured.

'He hates walking. Coming up this hill he has been so exhausted, that I am glad Sir Gabriel could not see his degenerate son. He came, Judith—Mr. Danesdale presented himself at Yoresett House, and said you had desired him to give your love, and to say that he was to stay lunch, and see that I set off at half-past two, as you had no trust at all in my punctuality. I thought it rather odd, but allowed him to remain. And then he said that part of his commission had been to come with me until we met you, as you know my habit of loitering on the wayside. Rhoda said she didn't believe him, and it was an insult. What I want to know is, did he tell the truth?'

Here the sound of wheels just behind them caused them to turn. Coming down the hill was a dogcart, which Bernard Aglionby was

driving, his man sitting behind him. His piercing eyes glanced from one to the other of the group, till they rested upon Judith. Randulf and Judith returned his salutation. Then the dog-cart flashed past, and disappeared round a bend in the road.

'Who is that?' asked Delphine, in surprise.

'Our new cousin, Bernard Aglionby,' responded Judith, in a sharp, dry tone. At this juncture Randulf remarked that he would not detain them any longer. He wished them good-afternoon, and took his way back to Yoresett. The girls were left alone.

Arm-in-arm they paced about the tiny square courtyard of the equally tiny Friends' Meeting House before alluded to.

'Well!' said Delphine, pressing her sister's arm, with a quick excited movement, which the other at once remarked, 'what is it? I suppose you would not ask me into that man's house, and quite right, too. He looks a stern, hard creature, with his dark face

and frowning eyes. How has he treated you?'

'Most kindly. His appearance is a little against him, I think. But had he known that I wished to see you, he would have offered to send a carriage for you, I know. I think he has behaved admirably!'

'Really Ju! You astonish me! How would you have had him behave? He has got all Uncle Aglionby's money and property. The least he could do was to behave with courtesy towards those whom he had supplanted.'

'Well, you know, when the will was read, mamma's behaviour really was enough to try a saint, let alone a young man with a sharp temper, as he has.'

'You seem to know all about his temper very quickly.'

'I've had opportunities, you see.'

Judith then told her sister all about that most unpleasant scene, and her mother's behaviour throughout, and how well, as she thought, Mr. Aglionby had behaved.

'You know I did feel inclined to hate him. One does long sometimes to be able to feel oneself an unqualified victim and martyr. And I did then. If I could have sat down, and on surveying my past life and future prospects, could have found that I had been wronged and ill-used all along, the victim of oppression and injustice, I should have been positively glad, because then I could have railed at everyone and everything, and refused to be comforted. But you know, Del, it is a fatal fact that there are *almost always* two sides to a question.'

'I don't see how there can be another view of this question. Surely, Judith, you will not try to make it out to be a just will. If he had never led us to expect—never cheated my mother into the belief——'

'True, my dear. All that is true on the outside. But there is another side to it, and a most miserable one, for us. If what I think is true, it is not we who have to complain. I can't tell you what I think, until I am more

certain on one or two points. Delphine, I have something to tell you that is not pleasant. I believe I am on the brink of a discovery: if I find myself right, I shall tell you of it, and no one else. Our life will then be still less smooth for us than it has been hitherto, but mamma will make no further opposition to our working, if we wish to do so.'

'You are very mysterious, Judith.'

'I know it must sound both odd and unreasonable. Well, if, as I expect, I find myself right (I don't know how I can speak so calmly of it all, I am sure), I shall then explain to you, and I am absolutely certain of your agreeing with me that it will be best, not only for you and me to go away and try to find some work, but for all of us to leave Yoresett—sell our house, go to a town and work, even if the work were plain sewing or lodging-house keeping.'

'Judith!' exclaimed Delphine, and there was a tone of horror in her voice.

'You will own that I am not in the habit of saying things without good reason?'

'Oh yes!'

'Then think about this, dear. It would be painful for many reasons to leave Yoresett.'

'It would be awful—ghastly,' said Delphine, with a shudder.

'Why, Del, that is a new view of the case from you,' said her sister, suddenly, looking keenly at her. 'You always used to be more ardent than even I was about it.'

'Of course I should be as willing as ever to go, if it were proved to be the best thing. But we should miss so many things—the freedom, the country air, and——'

'Freedom and country air may be bought too dear,' said Judith, with so sad and earnest a ring in her voice, that Delphine was fain to acquiesce, with a prolonged sigh of reluctance.

'I will not tell you now what I think,' said Judith; 'I will give myself time to find out whether my conjecture is wrong; and if so,

I will indeed repent towards the person whom I have wronged; though Mr. Aglionby holds strange views about repentance. But if I am right, you and I, Del, will be glad to hide our heads anywhere, so long as it is far enough away from Yoresett.'

Delphine made no answer to this. There was a silence as they paced about under the trees, now thinned of their foliage, while the shrivelled, scattered leaves rustled beneath their feet. Scarce a bird chirped. The sun had disappeared; the sky was grey and sad. The inhabitants of the hamlet of Counterside appeared all to be either asleep or not at home.

Up and down the little paved courtyard they paced, feeling vaguely that this quiet and peace in which they now stood was not to last for ever; that the tiny square Friends' Meeting House, where the silence was disturbed, it might be once a week, perhaps not so often, by a discourse, or a text, or an impromptu prayer from some Friend whom the

spirit moved to utterance of his thoughts, that this was not the kind of arena in which their life's battle was to be fought. This was a lull, a momentary pause. Delphine at last broke it by saying :

'You say Mr. Aglionby has strange notions about repentance — how do you mean ?'

'Oh, it would take too long to explain. We were talking together on Sunday night —we had supper together——'

'You had ! Then you are not at daggers drawn ?'

'Dear Delphine, no ! If you had been placed as I have been, you would understand how it was impossible for me to remain at daggers drawn with him, besides the disagreeableness of such a state of things. We dined together to-day. He thinks his grandfather's will was very unjust, and——'

'Mr. Danesdale said he was not half bad,' said Delphine, reflectively. 'Then, am I to like him, Ju ?'

'How absurd!' cried Judith, in a tone of irritation most unusual with her. 'As if you could like or dislike a man whom you did not know. He wishes to repair the injustice if he can; to get mamma's consent to some arrangement by which she should receive an allowance, or an income from a charge on the property—or whatever they call it; I don't know whether it will do, I am sure.'

'I don't see how it can be prevented, if mamma chooses to enter into such an arrangement, Judith.'

'Oh, I do, though. I should prevent it if I thought it wrong.'

'You, Judith?'

'Yes, I, Delphine. I think I shall have to prevent it.'

'You speak somehow quite differently,' said Delphine. 'I do not understand you, Judith. I feel as if something had happened, and you look as if you had the world on your shoulders.'

Judith looked at her, strangely moved;

Delphine was the dearest thing she had in the world—her most precious possession. To-day's interview marked a change in their relations to one another, an epoch. For until now they had always met on terms of equality; but this afternoon Judith knew that she was holding something back from her sister—knew that she stayed her hand from inflicting a blow upon her, which blow she yet felt would have to be dealt.

'I feel as if I had a great deal on my shoulders,' she answered, trying to speak carelessly. 'And now I must go, Delphine, or mamma will grow uneasy, and darkness will overtake me. And you must run home too.'

'Then, the day after to-morrow, in the afternoon, Judith?'

'Yes. Mr. Aglionby has promised that we shall have the brougham. Give my love to Rhoda, and good-night.'

The two figures exchanged a parting kiss in the twilight, and went their several ways.



CHAPTER VI.

'MY COUSIN JUDITH!'

BERNARD did not return to Scar Foot that night. He had left word with Mrs. Aveson that he might not do so. He remained all night at Mr. Whaley's, at Yoresett, discussing business matters with him. Judith, after her return, sat upstairs with her mother, and wondered what made her feel so wretched—what caused the sensation of fierce desolation in her heart. Mrs. Conisbrough was quickly recovering, and had begun to chat, though scarcely cheerfully. Her conversation was hardly of a

bracing or inspiriting nature, and the blow dealt by the old man's will was still felt almost in its full force. Likewise, she was a woman much given to wondering what was to become of them all.

But she no longer raged against Aglionby, and Judith did not know whether to be relieved or uneasy at the change.

On Tuesday morning Dr. Lowther called, and pronounced Mrs. Conisbrough quite fit to go home on the following day, as arranged; he added, that she might go downstairs that day if she chose. Judith trembled lest she should decide to do so, but she did not. She either could not, or would not face Bernard Aglionby, and, in him, her fate. So Judith said to herself, trying to find reasons for her mother's conduct, and striving, too, to still the fears which had sprung up in her own breast, to take no heed of the sickening qualms of terror which had attacked her at intervals ever since she had seen her mother on the morning of the reading of the will—

her expression, and the sudden failing of her voice ; her cowering down ; the shudder with which she had shrunk away from Bernard's direct gaze. That incident had marked the first stage of her terrors; the second had been reached when her mother had opened her eyes, and spoken her incoherent words about 'Bernarda,' and what Bernarda had said. The third and worst phase of her secret fear had been entered upon when Aglionby had solemnly assured her that, save his grandfather, he had never possessed a rich relation, on either father's or mother's side. She had pondered upon it all till her heart was sick. She saw the deep flush which overspread Mrs. Conisbrough's face, every time that Bernard's name was mentioned, and her own desire to 'depart hence and be no more seen,' grew stronger every hour. Late in the afternoon of Tuesday, Mrs. Conisbrough, tired of even pretending to listen to the book which Judith had been reading to her, advised the latter to take a walk, adding that she

wished to be alone, and thought she could go to sleep if she were left. Judith complied. She put on her hat and went out into the garden. Once there, the recollection came to her mind, that to-morrow she was leaving Scar Foot—that after to-morrow it would not be possible for her to return here; she took counsel with herself, and advised herself to take her farewell now, and once for all, of the dear familiar things which must henceforth be strange to her. Fate was kind, in so far as it allowed her to part on friendly terms from Bernard Aglionby, but that was all she could expect. If, for the future, she were enabled to stay somewhere in shelter and obscurity, and to keep silence, what more could be wanted? 'By me, and such as me, nothing,' she said inwardly, and with some bitterness.

In addition to this feeling, she was wearied of the house, of the solitude, and the confinement. Despite her grief and her foreboding, she being if not a 'perfect woman,' at least a 'nobly planned' one, felt strength and vigour

in every limb, and a desire for exercise and expansion, which would not let her rest. She wandered all round the old garden, gathered a spray from the now flowerless 'rose without thorns,' which flourished in one corner of it, sat for a minute or two in the alcove, and gazed at the prospect on the other side with a mournful satisfaction, and then, finding that it was still early, wandered down to the lake-side, to the little landing-place, where the boat with the grass-green sides, and with the name 'Delphine' painted on it, was moored.

'I should like a last row on the lake, dearly,' thought Judith, and quickly enough followed the other thought, 'and why not?' So thought, so decided. She went to the little shed where the oars were kept, seized a pair, and sprang into the boat, unchained it from its moorings, and with a strong, practised stroke or two, was soon in deep water. It gave her a sensation of joy, to be once more here, on the bosom of this sweet and glistening Shennamere. She pulled slowly, and with

many pauses; stopping every now and then to let her boat float, and to enjoy the exquisite panorama of hills surrounding the lake, and of the long, low front of Scar Foot in its gardens. A mist rushed across her eyes and a sob rose to her throat, as she beheld it.

'Ah,' thought Judith, 'and this is what will keep rising up in my memory at all times, and in all seasons, good or bad. Well, it *must* be, I suppose. Shennamere, good-bye!'

She had rowed all across the lake, a mile, perhaps, and was almost at the opposite shore, beneath the village of Busk. There was a gorgeous October sunset, flaming all across the heavens, and casting over everything a weird, beautiful light and glamour, and at the same time the dusk was creeping on, as it does in October, following quickly on the skirts of the sunset.

She skirted along by the shore, thinking, 'I must turn back,' and feeling strangely unwilling to do so. She looked at the grassy

fringe at the edge of the lake, which in summer was always a waste of the fair yellow iris: one of the sweetest flowers that blows, to her thinking and to mine. She heard the twittering of some ousels, and other water birds. She heard the shrill voice of a young woman on the road, singing a song. She raised her eyes to look for the young woman, wondering whether it were any acquaintance of hers, and before her glance had time to wander far enough, it rested, astonished, upon the figure of Bernard Aglionby; whose presence on that road, and on foot, was a mystery to her, since his way to Scar Foot lay on the other side of the lake.

But he was standing there, had stopped in his walk, evidently, so that she knew not from which direction he came, and was now ifting his hat to her.

'Good-afternoon!' cried Judith quickly, and surprised to feel her cheeks grow hot.

'Good-afternoon,' he responded, coming

down to the water's edge, and looking, as usual, very earnest. 'You are not rowing about here all alone?' he added, in some astonishment.

This question called up a smile to Judith's face, and she asked, leaning on her oars:

'And why not, pray?'

'It is dangerous. And you are alone, and a lady.'

Judith laughed outright. 'Shennamere dangerous! That shows how little you know about it. I have rowed up and down it since I was a child; indeed, any child could do it.'

'Could it? I wish you would let me try, then.'

'Would you like it, really?' asked Judith, in some surprise.

'There is nothing I should like better, if you will let me.'

'Then see! I will row up to the shore, and you can get in and pull me back if you

will, for I begin to feel my arms tired. It is some time since I have rowed, now.'

This was easily managed. He took her place, and she took the tiller-cords, sitting opposite to him. It was not until after this arrangement had been made, and they were rowing back in a leisurely manner, towards Scar Foot, that Judith began to feel a little wonder as to how it had all happened—how Bernard came to be in the boat with her, rowing her home. He was very quiet, she noticed, almost subdued, and he looked somewhat tired. His eyes rested upon her every now and then with a speculative, half-absent expression, and he was silent, till at last she said :

'How came you on the Lancashire road, Mr. Aglionby, and on foot? I thought you would be driving back from Yoresett.'

'I did drive as far as the top of the hill above the bridge, and then I got out to walk round this way. You must know that I find a pleasure which I cannot express, in simply

wandering about here, and looking at the views. It is perfectly delightful. But I might say, how came you to be at this side of the lake, alone and at sunset?'

'That is nothing surprising, for me. We are leaving to-morrow, after which we shall have done with Scar Foot for ever. I have been bidding good-bye to it all. The house, the garden, the lake, everything.'

That 'everything' came out with an energy which smacked of anything but resignation pure and simple.

'Bidding good-bye? Ah, I must have seemed a bold, insolent intruder, at such a moment. I wonder you condescended to speak to me. I wonder you did not instantly turn away, and row back again, with all speed. Instead of which—I am here with you.'

Judith did not reply, though their eyes met, and her lips parted. It was a jest, but a jest which she found it impossible to answer. Aglionby also perhaps judged it

best to say nothing more. Yet both hearts swelled. Though they maintained silence, both felt that there was more to be said. Both knew, as they glided on in the sharp evening air, in the weird light of the sunset, that this was not the end; other things had yet to happen. Some of the sunset glow had already faded, perhaps it had sunk with its warmth and fire into their hearts, which were hot; the sky had taken a more pallid hue. At the foot of the lake, Addlebrough rose, bleak and forbidding: Judith leaned back, and looked at it, and saw how cold it was, but while she knew the chillness of it, she was all the time intensely, feverishly conscious of Aglionby's proximity to herself. Now and again, for a second at a time, her eyes were drawn irresistibly to his figure. How rapidly had her feelings towards him been modified! On the first day she had seen him, he had struck her as an enthusiastic provincial politician: he had been no more a real person to her than if she had never seen

him. Next she had beheld him walking behind Mr. Whaley into the parlour at Scar Foot; had seen the cool uncompromising curve of his lips, the proud, cold glance in his eyes. Then, he had suddenly become the master, the possessor, wielding power undisputed and indisputable over what she had always considered her own, not graspingly, but from habit and association. She had for some time feared and distrusted his hardness, but gradually yet quickly those feelings had changed, till now, without understanding how, she had got to feel a deep admiration for, and delight in his dark, keen face; full of strength, full of resolution and pride; it was all softened at the present moment, and to her there seemed a beauty not to be described in its sombre tints, and in the outline, expressive of such decision and firmness, a firmness which had just now lost the old sneering vivacity of eye and lip.

It all seemed too unstable to be believed in. Would it ever end? Gliding onwards,

to the accompaniment of a rhythmic splash of the oars, and ripple of the water, with the mountains apparently floatingly receding from before them, while the boat darted onwards. A month ago, this young man had been an obscure salesman in an Irkford warehouse, and she, Judith Conisbrough, had been the supposed co-heiress, with her sisters, of all John Aglionby's lands and money: now the obscure salesman was in full possession of both the lands and the money, while from her, being poor, had been taken even that she had, and more had yet to go. She felt no resentment towards Aglionby, absolutely none: for herself she experienced a dull sensation of pain; a shrinking from the years to come of loneliness, neglect, and struggle. She pictured the future, as she glided on in the present. He, as soon as he had settled things to his pleasure, would get married to that tall, fair girl with whom she had seen him. They would live at Scar Foot, or wherever else it

list them to live; they would be happy with one another; would rejoice in their possessions, and enjoy life side by side:—while she—bah! she impatiently told herself—of what use to repine about it? That only made one look foolish. It was so, and that was all about it. The sins of the fathers should be relentlessly and unsparingly visited upon the children. He—her present companion, had said so, and she attached an altogether unreasonable importance to his words. He had held that creed in the days of his adversity and poverty, that creed of 'no forgiveness.' If it had supported him, why not her also? True, he was a man, and she was a woman, and all men, save the most unhappy and unfortunate of all, were taught and expected to work. She had only been forced to wait. Perhaps, if he had not had to work, and been compelled to forget himself and his wrongs in toil, he might have proved a harder adversary now than he was.

The boat glided alongside the landing-

place. He sprang up, jumped upon the boards, and handed her out.

'It is nearly dark,' he observed, and his voice, though low, was deep and full, as a voice is wont to be when deep thoughts or real emotion has lately stirred the mind. 'We will send out to have the things put away.' He walked beside her up the grassy path, as silent as she was, and her heart was full. Was it not for the last time? As he held the wicket open for her, and then followed her up the garden, he said:

'Miss Conisbrough, I have a favour to ask of you.'

'A favour, what is it?'

'Only a trifle,' said Aglionby. 'It is, that you will sing me a song to-night—one particular song.'

'Sing you a song!' ejaculated Judith, amazed. And the request, considering the terms on which they stood, was certainly a calm one.

'Yes, the song I overheard you singing on

Sunday night, "Goden Abend, Gode Nacht!" I want to hear it again.'

They now stood in the porch, and as Judith hesitated, and looked at him, she found his eyes bent upon her face, as if he waited, less for a reply, than for compliance with his request—or demand—she knew not which it was. She conquered her surprise; tried to think she felt it to be a matter of indifference, and said, 'I will sing it, if you like.'

'I do like, very much. And when will you sing it?' he asked, pausing at the foot of the stairs. Judith had ascended a step or two.

'Oh, when Mrs. Aveson calls me down to supper,' she answered slowly, her surprise not yet overcome.

'Thank you. You are very indulgent, and I assure you I feel proportionately grateful,' said Aglionby, with a smile which Judith knew not how to interpret. She said not a word, but left him at the foot of the stairs

with an odd little thrill shooting through her, as she thought :

' I was not wrong. He does delight to be the master—and perhaps I ought to have resisted—though I don't know why. One might easily obey that kind of master—but what does it all matter ? After to-morrow afternoon, all this will be at an end.'

Aglionby turned into the parlour as she went upstairs ; the smile still lingering on his lips. All the day, off and on, the scene had haunted him in imagination—Judith seated at the piano, singing, he standing somewhere near her, listening to that one particular song. All day, too, he had kept telling himself that, all things considered, it would hardly do to ask her to sing it ; that it would look very like impertinence if he did ; would be presuming on his position—would want some more accomplished tactician than he was, to make the request come easily and naturally.

Yet (he thought, as he stood by the window), whether he had done it easily or

not, it had been done. He had asked her, and she had consented. What else would she do for him, he wondered, if he asked her. Then came a poignant regretful wish that he had asked her for something else. In reflecting upon the little scene which was just over, he felt a keen, pungent pleasure, as he remembered her look of surprise, and seemed to see how she gradually yielded to him, with a certain unbending of her dignity, which he found indescribably and perilously fascinating.

'I wish I had asked her for something else!' he muttered. 'Why had I not my wits about me? A trumpery song! Such a little thing! I am glad I made her understand that it was a trifle. I should like to see her look if I asked her a real favour. I should like to see how she took it. Something that it would cost her something to grant—something the granting of which argued that she looked with favour upon one. Would she do it? By Jove, if her pride were

tamed to it, and she did it at last, it would be worth a man's while to go on his knees for it, whatever it was.'

He stood by the window, frowning over what seemed to him his own obtuseness, till at last a gleam of pleasure flitted across his face.

'I have it!' he said within himself, with a triumphant smile. 'I will make her promise. She will not like it, she will chafe under it, but she shall promise. The greatest favour she could confer upon me, would be to receive a favour from me—and she shall. Then she can never look upon me as "nobody" again.'

He rang for lights, and pulled out a bundle of papers which Mr. Whaley had given to him to look over, but on trying to study them, he found that he could not conjure up the slightest interest in them; that they were, on the contrary, most distasteful to him. He opened the window at last, and leaned out, saying to himself, as he flung the papers upon the table:

'If she knew what was before her, she would not come down. But she has promised, and heaven forbid that I should forewarn and forearm her.'

The night was fine; moonless, but starlight. He went outside, lit his pipe, and paced about. He had been learning from Mr. Whaley what a goodly heritage he had entered upon. He was beginning to understand how he stood, and what advantages and privileges were to be his. All the time that he conned them over, the face of Judith Conisbrough seemed to accompany them, and a sense of how unjustly she had been treated, above all others, burnt in his mind. Before he went to Irkford, before he did anything else, this question must be settled. It should be settled to-night, between him and her.

He meant first to make her astonished, to see her put on her air of queenly surprise at his unembarrassed requests, and then he meant her to submit, for her mother's and sisters' sake, and, incidentally, for his pleasure.

It was an agreeable picture ; one, too, of a kind that was new to him. He did not realise its significance for himself. He only knew that the pleasure of conquest was great, when the obstacle to be conquered was strong and beautiful.

He was roused from these schemes and plans by the sound of some chords struck on the piano, and he quickly went into the house. Judith had seated herself at the piano: she had resumed her usual calmness of mien, and turned to him, as he entered.

'I thought this would summon you, Mr. Aglionby. You seem fond of music.'

'Music has been fond of me, and a kind friend to me, always,' said he. 'I see you have no lights. Shall I ring for candles ?'

'No, thank you. I have no music with me. All that I sing, must be sung from memory, and the firelight will be enough for that.'

She did not at once sing the song he had asked for, but played one or two fragments

first; then struck the preluding chords and sang it.

'I like that song better than anything I ever heard,' said he emphatically, after she had finished it.

'I like it too,' said Judith. 'Mrs. Malleson gave it me, or I should never have become possessed of such a song. Do you know Mrs. Malleson?' she added.

'No. Who is she?'

'The wife of the vicar of Stanniforth. I hope he will call upon you, but of course he is sure to do so. And you will meet them out. I advise you to make a friend of Mrs. Malleson, if you can.'

'I suppose,' observed Bernard, 'that most, or all of the people who knew my grandfather will call upon me, and ask me to their houses?'

'Of course.'

'How odd that seems, doesn't it? If I had not, by an accident, become master here—if I had remained in my delightful ware-

house at Irkford, none of these people would have known of my existence; or if they had, they would have taken no notice of me. Not that I consider it any injustice,' he added quickly, 'because I hold that unless you prove yourself in some way noticeable, either by being very rich, or very clever, or very handsome, or very something, you have no right whatever to complain of neglect—none at all. Why *should* people notice you?'

'Just so; only you know, there is this to be said on the other side. If all these people had known as well as possible who you were, and where you lived, and all about you, they would still have taken no notice of you while you were in that position. I don't want to disparage them. I am sure some of them are very good, kind-hearted people. I am only speaking from experience.'

'And you are right enough. You are not going?' he added, seeing that she rose. , Supper is not ready yet.'

'Thank you. I do not want any supper. And it is not very early.'

'Then, if you will go, I must say now what I wanted to say. You need not leave me this instant, need you? I really have something to say to you, if you will listen to me.'

Judith paused, looked at him, and sat down again.

'I am in no hurry,' said she; 'what do you wish to say to me?'

'You said this afternoon, that you had gone to say good-bye to Scar Foot, to the lake—to everything; that after you left here to-day you would have "done with" Scar Foot. It would no longer be anything to you. You meant, I suppose, that you would never visit it again. Why should that be so?'

They were seated, Judith on the music-stool, on which she had turned round when they began to talk, and he leaning forward on a chair just opposite her. Close to them

was the broad hearth, with its bright fire and sparkling blazes, lighting up the two faces very distinctly. He was looking very earnestly at her, and he asked the question in a manner which showed that he intended to have an answer. It was not wanting. She replied almost without a pause :

'Well, you see, we cannot possibly come here now, as we were accustomed to do in my uncle's time, just when we chose ; to ramble about for an hour or two, take a meal with him, and then go home again, or, if he asked us, to spend a few days here : it would not do.'

'But you need not be debarred from ever coming to the place, just because you cannot do exactly as you used to do.'

She was silent, with a look of some pain and perplexity—not the dignified surprise he had expected to see. But the subject was, or rather it had grown, very near to Bernard's heart. He was determined to argue the question out.

'Is it because Scar Foot has become mine, because I could turn you out if I liked, and because you are too proud to have anything to do with me?' he asked, coolly and deliberately.

Judith looked up, shocked.

'What a horrible idea! What could have put such a thought into your head?'

'Your elaborate ceremonial of everlasting farewell, this afternoon, I think,' he answered, and went on boldly, though he saw her raise her head somewhat indignantly. 'Do listen to me, Miss Conisbrough; I know that in your opinion I must be a most unwelcome interloper. But I think you will believe me when I say that I have nothing but kindly feelings towards you—that I would give a good deal—even sacrifice a good deal to be on kindly terms with Mrs. Conisbrough and you, and your family. I wish to be just, to repair my grandfather's injustice. You know, as we discovered the other night, we are relations. What I want to ask is, will

you not meet me half-way? You will not hold aloof—I beg you will not! You will help me to conciliate Mrs. Conisbrough, to repair in some degree the injustice which has been done her. I am sure you will. I count securely upon you,' he added, looking full into her face, 'for you are so utterly outside all petty motives of spite or resentment. You could not act upon a feeling of pique or offence, I am sure.'

She was breathing quickly; her fingers locked in one another; her face a little averted, and flushed, as he could see, by something more than the fire-light.

'You have far too good an opinion of me,' she said, in a low tone; 'you are mistaken about me. I *try* to forget such considerations, but I assure you I am not what you take me for. I am soured, I believe, and embittered by many things which have conspired to make my life rather a lonely one.'

'How little you know yourself!' said Bernard. 'If I had time I should laugh at

you. But I want you to listen to me, and seriously to consider my proposal. Will you not help me in this plan? You said at first, you know, that you would not oppose it. Now I want you to promise your co-operation.'

'In other words,' said Judith, quietly, 'you want me to persuade mamma to accept as a gift from you, some of the money which she had expected to have, but which, as is very evident, my uncle was at the last determined she should not have.'

Aglionby smiled. He liked the opposition, and had every intention of conquering it.

'That is the way in which you prefer to put it, I suppose,' he said. 'I do not see why you should, I am sure. You did not use such expressions about it the other night, and, at any rate, I have your promise. But I fear you think the suggestion an impertinent one. How am I to convince you that nothing could be further from my thoughts, than impertinence?'

'I never thought it was impertinent,' answered Judith, and if her voice was calm, her heart was not. Not only had she not thought him impertinent, but she was strangely distressed and disturbed at his imagining she had thought him so.

'I thought,' she went on, 'that it was very kind, very generous.'

'I would rather you took it as being simply just. But, at any rate, you will give me your assistance, for I know that without it I shall never succeed in getting Mrs. Conisbrough's consent to my wishes.'

He spoke urgently. Judith was moved—distressed—he saw.

'I know I gave you a kind of promise,' she began slowly.

'A kind of promise! Your words were, "I shall not oppose it." Can you deny it?'

'No, those were my words. But I had had no time to think about it then. I have done so since. I have looked at it in every possible light, with the sincere desire to

comply with your wish, and all I can say is, that I must ask you to release me from my promise.'

'Not unless you tell me why,' said he, in a deep tone of something like anger.

'I cannot tell you why,' said Judith, her own full tones vibrating and growing somewhat faint. 'I can only ask you to believe me when I say that it would indeed be best in every way if, after we leave your house, you cease to take any notice of us. If we meet casually, either in society or in any other way, there is no reason why we should not be friendly. But it must end there. It is best that it should do so. And do not try to help my mother in the way you proposed. I—I cannot give any assistance in the matter, if you do.'

This was not the kind of opposition which Aglionby had bargained for. For a few moments he was silent, a black frown settling on his brow, but far indeed from having given up the game. Nothing had ever before

aroused in him such an ardent desire to prevail. He was thinking about his answer; wondering what it would be best for him to say, when Judith, who perhaps had misunderstood his silence, resumed in a low, regretful voice:

'To spend money which had come from you—to partake of comforts which your generosity had procured, would be impossible—to me, at any rate. It would scorch me, I feel.'

Again a momentary silence. Then the storm broke:

'You have such a loathing for me, you hate me so bitterly and so implacably that you can sit there, and say this to me, with the utmost indifference,' with passionate grief in his voice; grief and anger blended in a way that cut her to the quick. And so changed was he all in a moment, that she was startled, and almost terrified.

'What!' she faltered, 'have I said something wrong? I, hate you! Heaven forbid!

It would be myself that I should hate, because——'

'Because you had touched something that was defiled by coming from me. Because it had been mine!'

'Thank God that it is yours!' said Judith suddenly, and in a stronger tone. It is the one consolation that I have in the matter, When I think how very near it was to being ours, and that we might have had it and used it, I feel as if I had escaped by little short of a miracle, from——'

She stopped suddenly.

'I do not understand you.'

'Do not try. Put me down as an ill-disposed virago. I feel like one sometimes. And yet, I would have you believe that I appreciate your motives—it is out of no ill-feeling——'

'It is useless to tell me that,' he broke in, in uncontrollable agitation. 'I see that you have contained your wrath until this evening; you have nourished a bitter grudge against

me, and you feel that the time has come for you to discharge your debt. You have succeeded. You wished to humiliate me, and you have done so most thoroughly, and as I never was humiliated before. Understand—if you find any gratification in it, that I am wounded and mortified to the quick. I had hoped that by stooping—by using every means in my power—to please you, I should succeed in conciliating you and yours. I wished to put an end to this horrible discord and division, to do that which was right, and without doing which, I can never enjoy the heritage that has fallen to me. No, never! and you—have led me on—have given me your promise, and now you withdraw it. You know your power, and that it is useless for me to appeal to Mrs. Conisbrough, if you do not allow her to hear me, and——'

'You accuse me strangely,' she began, in a trembling voice, forgetting that she had desired him to look upon her as a virago, and appalled by the storm she had aroused, and

yet feeling a strange, thrilling delight in it, and a kind of reckless desire to abandon herself to its fury. Even while she raised her voice in opposition to it, she hoped it would not instantly be lulled. There was something more attractive in it, than in the commonplace civilities of an unbroken and meaningless politeness. She had her half-conscious wish gratified to the utmost, for he went on:

'Strangely, how strangely? I thought women were by nature fitted to promote peace. I thought that you, of all others, would encourage harmony and kindness. I appealed to you, because I knew your will was stronger than that of your mother. It only needs your counsel and influence to make her see things as I wish her to see them. And you thrust me capriciously aside—your manner, your actions, all tell me to retire with the plunder I have got, and to gloat over it alone. You stand aside in scorn. You prefer poverty, and I believe you would

prefer starvation, to extending a hand to one whom you consider a robber and an upstart——'

'You are wrong, you are wrong!' she exclaimed vehemently and almost wildly, clasping her hands tightly together, and looking at him with a pale face and dilated eyes.

'Then, show me that I am wrong!' he said, standing before her, and extending his hands towards her. 'Repent what you have said about benefits derived from me *scorching* you!' (He did not know that the flash from his own eyes was almost enough to produce the same effect.) 'Recall it, and I will forget all this scene—as soon as I can, that is. Judith——' She started, changed colour, and he went on in his softest and most persuasive accent. 'My cousin Judith, despite all you have just been flinging at me of hard and cruel things, I still cling to the conviction that you are a noble woman, and I ask you once more for your friendship, and your

good offices towards your mother. Do not repulse me again.'

She looked speechlessly into his face. Where were now the scintillating eyes, the harsh discord of tone, the suppressed rage of manner? Gone; and in their stead there were the most dulcet sounds of a most musical voice; eyes that pleaded humbly and almost tenderly, and a hand held out beseechingly, craving her friendship, her good offices.

A faint shudder ran through Judith's whole frame. His words and the tone of them rang in her ears, and would ring there for many a day, and cause her heart to beat whenever she remembered them. 'Judith—my cousin Judith!' His hot earnestness, and the unconscious fascination which he could throw into both looks and tones, had not found her callous and immovable. While she did not understand what the feeling was which overmastered her, she yet felt the pain of having to repulse him amount to

actual agony. She felt like one lost and bewildered. All she knew or realised was, that it would have been delicious to yield unconditionally in this matter of persuading her mother to his will; to hear his wishes and obey them, and that of all things this was the one point on which she must hold out, and resist. Shaken by a wilder emotion than she had ever felt before, she suddenly caught the hands he stretched towards her, and exclaimed, brokenly: .

'Ah, forgive me, if you can, but do not be so hard upon me. You do not know what you are saying. I cannot obey you. I wish I could.'

She covered her face with her hands, with a short sob.

Aglionby could not at first reply. Across the storm of mortification and anger, of good-will repulsed, and reverence momentarily chilled, another feeling was creeping, the feeling that behind all this agitation and refusal on her part, something lay hidden

which was not aversion to him; that the victory he had craved for was substantially his: she did not refuse his demand because she had no wish to comply with it. She denied him against her will, not with it. She was not churlish. He might still believe her noble. She was harassed evidently, worn with trouble, and with some secret grief. He forgot for the moment that a confiding heart at Irkford looked to him for support and comfort; indeed, he had a vague idea, which had not yet been distinctly formulated, that there were few troubles which Miss Vane could not drive away, by dint of dress, and jewellery, and amusement. He felt that so long as he had a full purse, he could comfort Lizzie and cherish her. This was a different case; this was a suffering which silk attire and diamonds could not alleviate, a wound not to be stanched for a moment by social distinction and the envy of other women. His heart ached sympathetically. He could comprehend that feeling.

He knew that he could feel likewise. Nay, had he not experienced a foretaste of some such feeling this very night, when she had vowed that she could not aid him in his scheme, and he had felt his newly-acquired riches turn poor and sterile in consequence, and his capacity for enjoying them shrivel up? But there was a ray of joy even amidst this pain, in thinking that this hidden obstacle did not imply anything derogatory to her. He might yet believe her noble, and treat her as noble. His was one of the natures which can not only discern nobility in shabby guise, but which are perhaps almost too prone to seek it there, rather than under purple mantles; being inclined to grudge the wearers of the latter any distinction save that of inherited outside splendour. The fact that Miss Conisbrough was a very obscure character; that she was almost sordidly poor; that the gown she wore was both shabby and old-fashioned, and that whatever secret troubles she had, she must

necessarily often be roused from them, in order to consider how most advantageously to dispose of the metaphorical sixpence—all this lent to his eyes, and to his way of thinking, a reality to her grief; a concreteness to her distress. He had no love for moonshine and unreality, and though Judith Conisbrough had this night overwhelmed him with contradictions and vague, intangible replies to his questions, yet he was more firmly convinced than ever that all about her was real.

If she had to suffer—and he was sure now that she had—he would be magnanimous, though he did not consciously apply so grand a name to his own conduct. After a pause, he said, slowly:

'I must ask your forgiveness. I had no business to get into a passion. It was unmanly, and, I believe, brutal. I can only atone for it in one way, and that is by trying to do what you wish; though I cannot conceal that your decision is a bitter blow to me.

I had hoped that everything would be so different. But tell me once again that you do not *wish* to be at enmity with me; that it is no personal ill-will which——'

'Oh, Mr. Aglionby!'

'Could you not stretch a point for once,' said Bernard, looking at her with a strangely mingled expression, 'as we are so soon to be on mere terms of distant civility, and address me like a cousin—just once? It would not be much to do, after what you have refused.'

There was a momentary pause. Aglionby felt his own heart beat faster, as he waited for her answer. At last she began, with flaming cheeks, and eyes steadily fixed upon the ground:

'You mean—Bernard—there is nothing I desire less than to be at enmity with you. Since we have been under your roof here, I have learnt that you at least are noble, whatever I may be; and——'

At this point Judith looked up, having

overcome, partially at least, her tremulousness, but she found his eyes fixed upon hers, and her own fell again directly. Something seemed to rise in her throat and choke her; at last she faltered out:

'Do not imagine that I suffer nothing in refusing your wish.'

'I believe you now, entirely,' he said, in a tone almost of satisfaction. 'We were talking about creeds the other night, and you said you wanted a strong one. I assure you it will take all the staying power of mine to enable me to bear this with anything like equanimity. And meantime, grant me this favour, let me accompany you home to-morrow, and do me the honour to introduce me to your sisters; I should like to know my cousins by sight, at any rate—if Mrs. Conisbrough will allow it, that is.'

'Mamma will allow it—yes.'

'And I promise that after that I will not trouble nor molest you any more.'

'Don't put it in that way.'

'I must, I am afraid. But you have not promised yet.'

'Certainly, I promise. And, oh! Mr. Aglionby, I am glad, I am *glad* you have got all my uncle had to leave,' she exclaimed, with passionate emphasis. 'The knowledge that you have it will be some comfort to me in my dreary existence, for it is and will be dreary.'

She rose now, quite decidedly, and went towards the door. He opened it for her, and they clasped hands silently, till he said, with a half-smile which had in it something wistful:

'*Goden Abend!*'

'*Gode Nacht!*' responded Judith, but no answering smile came to her lips—only a rush of bitter tears to her eyes. She passed out of the room; he gently closed the door after her, and she was left alone with her burden.



CHAPTER VII.

AN AFTERNOON EPISODE.

'E must not go out this afternoon, because they are coming, you know,' observed Rhoda to Delphine.

'I suppose not, and yet, I think it is rather a farce, our staying in to receive them. I cannot think it will give them any joy.'

'You are such a tiresome, analytical person, Delphine! Always questioning my statements——'

'Sometimes you make such queer ones.'

'I wish something would happen. I wish

a change would come,' observed Rhoda, yawning. 'Nothing ever does happen here.'

'Well, I should have said that a good deal had happened lately. Enough to make us very uncomfortable at any rate.'

'Oh, you mean about Uncle Aglionby and his grandson. Do you know, Del, I have a burning, a consuming curiosity to see that young man. I think it must have been most delightfully romantic for Judith to be staying at Scar Foot all this time. I don't suppose she has made much of her opportunities. I expect she has been fearfully solemn, and has almost crushed him, if he is crushable, that is, with the majesty of her demeanour. Now, *I* should have been amiability itself. I think the course I should have taken would have been, to make him fall in love with me——'

'You little stupid! When he is engaged to be married already!'

'So he is! How disgusting it is to find all one's schemes upset in that way. Well,

I don't care whether he is engaged or not. I want to see him awfully, and I think it was intensely stupid of mamma to quarrel with him.'

'No doubt you would have acted much more circumspectly, being a person of years, experience, and great natural sagacity.'

'I have the sagacity at any rate, if not the experience. And after all, that is the great thing, because if you have experience without sagacity, you might just as well be without it.'

'I know you are marvellously clever,' said Delphine, 'but you are an awful chatterbox. Do be quiet, and let me think.'

'What can you possibly have to think about here?'

'All kinds of things, about which I want to come to some sort of an understanding with myself. So hold your peace, I pray you.'

They had finished their early dinner, and had retired to that pleasant sunny parlour

where Judith had found them, little more than a week ago, on her return from Irkford. Delphine, being a young woman of high principle, had pulled out some work, but Rhoda was doing absolutely nothing, save swaying backwards and forwards in a rocking-chair, while she glanced round with quick, restless grey eyes at every object in the room, oftenest at her sister. Not for long did she leave the latter in the silence she had begged for.

'Won't you come upstairs to the den, Delphine? It is quite dry and warm this afternoon, and I want you so to finish that thing you were doing.'

'Not now, but presently, perhaps. I feel lazy just now.'

Pause, while Rhoda still looked about her, and at last said abruptly: 'Delphine, should you say we were a good-looking family?'

Delphine looked up.

'Good-looking? It depends on what people call good-looking.'

'One man's meat is another man's poison, I suppose you mean. I have been considering the subject seriously of late, and on comparing us with our neighbours, I have come to the conclusion that, taken all in all, we *are* good-looking.'

'Our good looks are all the good things we have to boast of, then,' said Delphine unenthusiastically, as she turned her lovely head to one side, and contemplated her work —her sister keenly scrutinising her in the meantime.

'Well, good looks are no mean fortune. What was it I was reading the other day about—"As much as beauty better is than gold," or words to that effect.'

'Pooh!' said Delphine, with a little derisive laugh.

'Well, but it is true.'

'In a kind of way, perhaps—not practically.'

'In a kind of way—well, in such a way as this. Suppose—we may suppose anything,

you know, and for my part, while I am about it, I like to suppose something splendid at once—suppose that *you* were, for one occasion only, dressed up in a most beautiful ball-dress; *eau de Nil* and wild roses, or the palest blue and white lace, or pale grey and pale pink, you know—ah, I see you are beginning to smile at the very idea. I believe white would suit you best, after all—a billow of white, with little humming-birds all over it, or something like that. Well—imagine yourself in this dress, with everything complete, you know, Del'—she leaned impressively forward—'fan and shoes, and gloves and wreath, and a beautiful pocket-handkerchief like a bit of scented mist—and jewellery that no one could find any fault with; and then suppose Philippa Danesdale popped down in the same room, as splendid as you please—black velvet and diamonds, or satin, or silk, and ropes of pearls, or anything grand, with her stupid little prim face and red hair——'

'Oh, for shame, Rhoda! You are quite spiteful.'

'I, spiteful!' cried Rhoda, with a prolonged note of indignant surprise. 'That *is* rich! Who has drawn Miss Danesdale, I wonder, in all manner of attitudes:—"Miss Danesdale engaged in Prayer," holding her Prayer-book with the tips of her lavender kid fingers, and looking as if she were paying her Maker such a compliment in coming and kneeling down to Him, with an ivory-backed Prayer-book and a gold-topped scentbottle to sustain her through the operation? "Miss Danesdale, on hearing of the Mésalliance of a Friend"—now, who drew *that*, Delphine? and many another as bad? My sagacity, which you were jeering at just now, suggests a reason for your altered tone. But I will spare you, and proceed with my narrative. Suppose what I have described to be an accomplished fact, and then suppose a perfect stranger—we'll imagine Mr. Danesdale to be one, because I like to make my ideas very

plain to people, and there's nothing like being personal for effecting that result—suppose him there, not knowing anything about either of you, whether you were rich or poor, or high or low—now, which of the two do you think he would be likely to dance with oftenest?'

'How should I know?'

'Delphine, you used to be truthful once—candid and honest. The falling off is deplorable. "Evil communications"—I won't finish it. You are shirking my question. Of course he would dance with you, and you know he would. There's no doubt of it, because you would look a vision of beauty——'

'Stuff and nonsense!'

'And Miss Danesdale would look just what she is, a stiff, prudish *plain* creature. And so beauty *is* better than gold.'

'Yes, under certain conditions, if one could arbitrarily fix them. But we have to look at conditions as they are, not as we

could fix them if we tried. Suppose, we'll say, that he had been dancing with me all the evening——'

'Which he would like to do very much, I haven't a doubt.'

'And suddenly, someone took him aside, and said: "Friend, look higher. She with whom thou dancest has not a penny, while she who stands in yonder corner neglected, lo! she hath a fortune of fifty thousand pounds, which neither moth nor rust can corrupt." After that, I might dance as long as I liked, but it would be alone.'

'I call that a very poor illustration, and I don't know that it would be the case at all. All I know is, that it pleases you to pretend to be cynical, though you don't feel so in the very least. I do so like to dream sometimes, and to think what I would do if we were rich! Delphine, *don't* you wish we were rich?'

'Not particularly; I would rather be busy. I wish I was a great painter, that's what I

should like to be, with every hour of the day filled up with work and engagements. Oh, I am so tired of doing nothing. I feel sometimes as if I could kill myself.'

Before Rhoda had time to reply, Louisa, the maid, opened the door, remarking:

'Please, miss, there's Mr. Danesdale.'

The girls started a little consciously as he came in, saying, as Louisa closed the door after him:

'Send me away if I intrude. Your servant said you were in, and when I asked if you were engaged, she replied, "No, sir, they are a-doing of nothing." Encouraged by this report, I entered.'

'We are glad to see you,' said Delphine, motioning him to take a seat, and still with a slight flush on her face.

'I called for two reasons,' said Randulf, who, once admitted, appeared to feel his end gained: 'to ask if you arrived at home in safety after that confabulation with Miss Conisbrough, and to ask if you have any

news from Mrs. Conisbrough. How is she?'

'Much better, thank you. So much better, indeed, that we expect her and Judith home this afternoon——'

'Yes,' interposed Rhoda, 'so far from doing nothing, as Louisa reported, we were waiting for mamma's return.'

'Ah, I can tell Philippa then. She has been talking of calling to see Mrs. Conisbrough.'

It was Rhoda's turn to cast down her eyes a little, overcome by the reflections called up by this announcement. There was a pause; then Rhoda said:

'How thankful Judith and mother will be to come away from Scar Foot, and how very glad Mr. Aglionby will be to get rid of them!'

'Had you just arrived at that conclusion when I came?'

'Oh no! We were at what they call "a loose end," if you ever heard the expression. We were exercising our imaginations.'

Rhoda pursued this topic with imperturbable calm, undismayed by the somewhat alarmed glances given her by Delphine, who feared that her sister might, as she often did, indiscreetly reveal the very subject of a conversation.

'Were you? How?'

'We were imagining ourselves *rich*,' said Rhoda, with emphasis. 'You can never do that, you know, because you are rich already. We have the advantage of you there, and I flatter myself that that is a new way of looking at it.'

'I beg your pardon, Rhoda—I was not imagining myself rich. I was imagining myself——' she stopped suddenly.

'Imagining yourself what?' he asked, with deep interest.

'Oh, nothing—nonsense!' said Delphine hastily, disinclined to enter into particulars. He turned to Rhoda. Delphine looked at her with a look which said, 'Speak if you dare! Rhoda tossed her head and said:

'There's no crime in what you were wishing, child. She was imagining herself a great painter. That's Delphine's ambition. Like Miss Thompson, you know——'

'Oh no!' interposed Delphine, hastily—'not battle-pieces.'

'What then?',

'Landscape, I think, and animals,' said Delphine, still in some embarrassment.

'Del draws beautiful animals,' said Rhoda, turning to him, and speaking very seriously and earnestly. Randulf was charmed to perceive that the youngest Miss Conisbrough had quite taken him into her confidence, and he trusted that a little judiciously employed tact would bring Delphine to the same point.

'Oh, not beautiful, Rhoda! Only—' she turned to Randulf, losing some of the shyness which with her was a graceful hesitation and not the ugly awkward thing it generally is. 'Not beautiful at all, Mr. Danesdale; but it is simply that I cannot help, when I see

animals and beautiful landscapes—I absolutely can't *help* trying to copy them.'

'That shows you have a talent for it,' said Mr. Danesdale, promptly. 'You should have lessons.'

He could have bitten his tongue off with vexation the next moment, as it flashed into his mind that most likely she could not afford to have lessons.

'That would be most delightful,' said Delphine, composedly, 'but we can't afford to have lessons, you know, so I try not to think about it.'

Randulf was silent, his mind in a turmoil, feeling an heroic anger at those 'ceremonial institutions' not altogether unallied to those with which Mr. Herbert Spencer has made us familiar—which made it downright improper and impertinent for a young man to say to a young woman (or *vice versâ*), 'I am rich and you are poor. You have talent; allow me to defray the expenses of its cul-

tivation, and so to put you in the way of being busy and happy.'

'And do you paint from nature?' he asked at last.

'Of course,' replied Delphine, still not quite reconciled to being thus made a prominent subject of conversation. 'Why should I paint from anything else? Only, you know, one can't do things by instinct. Uncle Aglionby let me have some lessons once—a few years ago—oh, I did enjoy it! But he had a conversation with my painting-master one day, and the latter contradicted some of his theories, so he said he was an impudent scoundrel, and he would not have me go near him again. But I managed to learn something from him. Still, I don't understand the laws of my art—at least,' she added hastily, crimsoning with confusion, 'I don't mean to call my attempts art at all. Mamma thinks it great waste of time, and they are but daubs, I fear.'

'I wish you would show me some of them.

Where do you keep them? Mayn't I look at them?'

'Oh, I could not think of exposing them to your criticism! you, who have seen every celebrated picture that exists, and who know all about all the "schools," and who make such fun of things that I used to think so clever—you must not ask it indeed! Please don't.'

Delphine was quite agitated, and appealed to him, as if he could compel her to show them, even against her will.

'You cannot suppose that I would be severe upon anything of yours!' he exclaimed, with warmth. 'How can you do me such injustice!'

'If you did not say it, you would think it,' replied Delphine, 'and that would be worse. I can imagine nothing more unpleasant than for a person to praise one's things out of politeness, while thinking them very bad the whole time.'

'I never heard such unutterable nonsense,'

cried Rhoda, who had been watching her opportunity of cutting in. 'To hear you talk, one would imagine your pictures were not fit to be looked at. Mr. Danesdale, I should like you to see them, because I know they are good. Delphine does so like to run herself down. You should see her dogs and horses, I am sure they are splendid, far better than some of the things you see in grand magazines. And I think her little landscapes——'

'Rhoda, I shall have to go away, and lock myself up alone, if you will talk in this wild, exaggerated way,' said Delphine, in quiet despair.

'But you can't refuse, after this, to let me judge between you,' said Randulf, persuasively. 'An old friend like me—and after rousing my curiosity in this manner—Miss Conisbrough, you cannot refuse!'

'I—I really——'

'Let us take Mr. Danesdale to your den!' cried Rhoda, bounding off her chair, in a

sudden fit of inspiration. 'Come, Mr. Danesdale, it is up a thousand stairs, at the very top of the house, but you are young and fond of exercise, as we know, so you won't mind that.'

She had flung open the door, and led the way, running lightly up the stairs, and he had followed her, unheeding Delphine's imploring remonstrances, and thinking:

'By Jove, they are nice girls! No jealousy of one another. I'll swear to the pictures, whatever they may turn out to be.'

Delphine slowly followed, wringing her hands in a way she had when she was distressed or hurried, and with her white forehead puckered up in embarrassed lines. Rhoda flew ahead, and Randulf followed her, up countless stairs, along great broad, light passages, and even in his haste the young man had time to notice—or rather, the fact was forced upon his notice—how bare the place looked, and how empty. He felt suddenly, more than he had done before, how narrow

and restricted a life these ladies must be forced to lead.

Rhoda threw open the door of a large, light room, with a cold, clear northern aspect. It was bare, indeed; no luxurious *atelier* of a pampered student. Even the easel was a clumsy-looking thing, made very badly by a native joiner of Yoresett, who had never seen such a thing in his life, and who had not carried out the young lady's instructions very intelligently.

Randulf, looking round, thought of the expensive paraphernalia which his sister had some years ago purchased, when the whim seized her to paint in oils; a whim which lasted six months, and which had for sole result, bitter complaints against her master, as having no faculty for teaching, and no power of pushing his pupils on; while paints, easel, canvases and maulstick were relegated to a cockloft in disgust. Delphine's apparatus was of the most meagre and simple kind—in fact, it was absolutely deficient.

Two cane-bottomed chairs, sadly in need of repairs, and a rickety deal table, covered with rags and oil tubes, brushes, and other impedimenta, constituted the only furniture of the place.

'It's very bare,' cried Rhoda's clear, shrill young voice, as she marched onwards, not in the least ashamed of the said bareness. 'And in winter it's so cold that she can never paint more than an hour a day, because fires are out of the question. With one servant, you can't expect coals to be carried, and grates cleaned, four stories up the house. Now see, Mr. Danesdale. I'll be show-woman. I know everything she has done. You sit there, in that chair. We'll have the animals first. Most of them are in water-colours or crayons. Here's a good one, in watercolours, of Uncle Aglionby on his old "Cossack," with Friend looking at him, to know which way he shall go. Isn't it capital?'

Despite his heartfelt admiration for all the

Misses Conisbrough, and for Delphine in particular, Randulf fully expected to find, as he had often found before with the artistic productions of young lady amateurs, that their 'capital' sketches were so only in the fond eyes of partial sisters, parents and friends. Accordingly he surveyed the sketch held up by Rhoda's little brown hand with a judicial aspect, and some distrust. But in a moment his expression changed; a smile of pleasure broke out; he could with a light heart cry, 'Excellent.'

It was excellent, without any flattery. It had naturally the faults of a drawing executed by one who had enjoyed very little instruction; there was crudeness in it—roughness, a little ignorant handling; but it was replete with other things which the most admirable instruction cannot give: there was in it a spirit, a character, an individuality which charmed him, and which, in its hardy roughness, was the more remarkable and piquant, coming from such a delicate-looking creature as

Delphine Conisbrough. The old Squire's hard, yet characteristic features; the grand contours of old Cossack, the rarest hunter in all the country-side; and above all, the aspect of the dog: its inquiring ears and inquisitive nose, its tail on the very point, one could almost have said in the very action, of wagging an active consent; one paw upraised, and bent, ready for a start the instant the word should be given—all these details were as spirited as they were true and correct.

'It is admirable!' said Randulf, emphatically. 'If she has many more like that, she ought to make a fortune with them some time. I congratulate you, Miss Conisbrough'—to Delphine, who had just come in, with the same embarrassed and perplexed expression. 'I can somehow hardly grasp the idea that that slender little hand has made this strong, spirited picture. It shows the makings of a first-rate artist—but it is the very last thing I should have imagined you doing.'

'Ah, you haven't seen her sentimental

drawings yet,' said Rhoda, vigorously hunting about for more. Oh, here's one of her last. I've not seen this. Why—why—oh, what fun! Do you know it?'

'Rhoda, you little—oh *do* put it down!' cried the harassed artist, in a tone of sudden dismay, as she made a dart forward.

But Rhoda, with eyes in which mischief incarnate was dancing a tarantella, receded from before her, holding up a spirited sketch of a young man, a pointer, a retriever, a whip, an apple-tree, and in the tree a cat, apparently in the last stage of fury and indignation.

'Do you know it, Mr. Danesdale? Do you know it?' cried the delighted girl, dancing up and down, her face alight with mirth.

'Know it—I should think I do!' he cried, pursuing her, laughingly. 'Give it to me, and let me look at it. 'Tis I and my dogs, of course. Capital! Miss Conisbrough, you must really cement our friendship by presenting it to me—will you?'

He had succeeded in capturing it, and was studying it laughingly, while Delphine wrung her hands and exclaimed, 'Oh dear!'

'Splendid!' he cried again. 'It ought to be called "Randulf Danesdale and Eyeglass." And how very much wiser the dogs look than their master. Oh, this is a malicious sketch, Miss Conisbrough! But, malicious or not, I shall annex it, and you must not grudge it me.'

'If you are not offended——' began Delphine, confusedly.

'I offended?' Rhoda was rummaging amongst a pile of drawings with her back to them. Mr. Danesdale accompanied his exclamation with a long look of reproach, and surely of something else. Delphine pushed her golden hair back from her forehead, and stammered out:

'Then pray keep it, but don't show it to anyone!'

'"Keep it, but keep it dark," you mean. You shall be obeyed. At least no one shall know who did it. That shall be a delightful

secret which I shall keep for myself alone.'

Here Delphine, perhaps fearful of further revelations, advanced and, depriving Rhoda of the portfolio, said she hoped she might be mistress in her own den, and she would decide herself which drawings were fit to show to Mr. Danesdale. Then she took them into her own possession and doled them out with what both the spectators declared to be a very niggard hand.

Randulf, apart from his admiration of the Miss Conisbroughs, really cared for art, and knew something about pictures. He gave his best attention to the drawings which were now shown to him, and the more he studied them the more convinced he became that this was a real talent, which ought not to be left uncultivated, and which, if carefully attended to, would certainly produce something worthy. She showed him chiefly landscapes, and each and all had in it a spirit, an originality, and a wild grace peculiar to the vicinity, as well as

to the artist. There were sketches of Shennamere from all points of view, at all hours and at all seasons: by bright sunlight, under storm-clouds, by sentimental moonlight. There was a bold drawing of Addlebrough admirable as a composition. The colouring was crude and often incorrect, but displayed evident power and capacity for fine ultimate development. Now and then came some little touch, some delicate suggestion, some bit of keen, appreciative observation, which again and again called forth his admiration. Some of the smaller bits were, as Rhoda had said, sentimental—full of a delicate, subtle poetry impossible to define. These were chiefly autumn pictures—a lonely dank pool, in a circle of fading foliage; a view of his own father's house seen on a gusty September afternoon struck him much. He gradually became graver and quieter, as he looked at the pictures. At last, after contemplating for some time a larger and more ambitious attempt, in oils—a view of the splendid

rolling hills, the town of Middleham, and a portion of the glorious plain of York, and in the foreground the windings of the sweet river Yore, as seen from the hill called the Shawl' at Leyburn—he laid it down and said earnestly, all his drawl and all his half-jesting manner clean gone:

'Miss Conisbrough, you must not take my judgment as infallible, of course, but I have seen a good deal of this kind of thing, and have lived a good deal amongst artists, and it is my firm conviction that you have at any rate a very great talent—I should say genius. I think these first sketches, the animals, you know, are admirable, but I like the landscapes even better. I am sure that with study under a good master you might rise to eminence as a landscape-painter; for one sees in every stroke that you love the things you paint—love nature.'

'I do!' said Delphine, stirred from her reserve and shyness. 'I love every tree in this old dale; I love every stick and stone in

it, I think ; and I love the hills and the trees as if they were living things, and my friends. Oh, Mr. Danesdale, I am so glad you have not laughed at them ! I should never have had courage, you know, to show them to you. But it would have been misery to have them laughed at, however bad they had been. They have made me so happy—and sometimes so miserable. I could not tell you all they have been to me.'

'I can believe that,' said Randulf, looking with the clear, grave glance of friendship from one face to the other of the two girls, who were hanging on his words with eager intentness—for Rhoda, he saw, identified herself with these efforts of Delphine, and with the sorrow and the joy they had caused her, as intensely as if her own hand had made every stroke on the canvases. 'But you must learn ; you must study and work systematically, so as to cultivate your strong points and strengthen your weak ones.'

The light faded from Delphine's eyes. Her lips quivered.

'It is impossible,' said she, quietly. 'When one has no money one must learn to do without these things.'

'But that will never do. It must be compassed somehow,' he said, again taking up the view of Danesdale Castle, with the cloudy sky, which had so pleased him. 'Let me——'

'Oh, *here* you are! I have been searching for you all over the house,' exclaimed a voice—the voice of Judith—breaking in upon their eager absorption in their subject.

She looked in upon them, and beheld the group: Delphine sitting on the floor, holding up a huge, battered-looking portfolio, from which she had been taking her drawings; Rhoda standing behind her, alternately looking into the portfolio and listening earnestly to Randulf's words; the latter, seated on one of the rickety chairs before alluded to, and

holding in his hand the view of Danesdale Castle.

'I could not imagine where you were,' continued Judith, a look of gravity, and even of care and anxiety on her face.

'Well, come in and speak to us, unless you think we are very bad,' retorted Rhoda. 'Come and join the dance, so to speak. We are looking over Delphine's drawings, and Mr. Danesdale says they are very good.'

'Of course they are,' said Judith, coming in with still the same subdued expression. 'I am quite well, I thank you' (to Randulf, who had risen and greeted her); 'I hope you, too, are well. But, my dear children, you must come downstairs at once.'

'To see mother?' said Rhoda. 'Oh, I'll go; and I'll entertain her till you are ready to come down. Stay where you are. Del has not shown Mr. Danesdale all.'

'To see mother—yes,' said Judith, striving to speak cheerfully. Delphine saw that the

cheerfulness was forced, and became all attention at once.

'Of course you must come down and see mother at once,' proceeded Judith. 'But you have to see Mr. Aglionby too. He asked mother to present him to you, and she consented, so he has come with us. Therefore don't delay: let us get it over. And I am sure Mr. Danesdale will excuse——'

'Mr. Danesdale understands perfectly, and will carry himself off at once,' said Randulf, smiling good-naturedly.

'Wants to be introduced to us!' repeated Rhoda, wonderingly. 'Of all the odd parts of this very odd affair, *that* to my mind is the oddest. Why should he want to be introduced to us? What can he possibly want with our acquaintance?'

'Oh, don't be silly!' said Judith, a little impatiently.

'But I am very cross. I wanted Mr. Danesdale to see Delphine's "morbid views." She has some lovely morbid views, you

know. Delphine, just find that one of a girl drowned in a pond, and three hares sitting looking at her.'

'I shall hope to see that another time,' observed Randulf; 'it sounds delightfully morbid.'

Delphine had begun to put her pictures away, and her face had not yet lost the grieved expression it had taken when she had said she could not afford to have any lessons. Rhoda, mumbling rebelliously, had gone out of the room, and Judith had followed her, advising or rebuking in a lower tone. Thus Randulf and Delphine were left alone, with her portfolio between them, he still holding the drawing of the Castle. Delphine stretched out her hand for it.

'Don't think me too rapacious,' said he, looking at her, 'but—give me this one!'

'Why?'

'Because I want it for a purpose, and it would be a great favour. At least I should look upon it as such.'

'Should you? Pray, is that any reason why I should accord it to you?'

'Make it a reason,' said he, persuasively. 'I should prize it—you don't know how much.'

'As I say,' said Delphine, still rebelliously, 'that constitutes no reason for my giving it to you.'

'If I take it——'

'That would be stealing the goods and chattels of one who is already very poor,' said Delphine, half-gaily, half-sadly.

'And who is so noble in her poverty that she makes it noble too,' he suddenly and fervently said, looking at her with all his heart in his eyes.

She shook her head, unable to speak, but at last said hesitatingly:

'I do not know whether I ought—whether it is quite—quite——'

'In other words, you rather mistrust me,' said he, gently. 'I beg you will not do so. I want to help you, if you will not disdain

my help. Since you will have the bald truth, and the reason why I want your sketches, I have two reasons. The first is, that I should prize them exceedingly for their own sakes and for that of the giver—next, if you would trust me and my discretion, I will engage that they should bring you profit.'

'Do you mean,' said Delphine, with a quick glance at him, and a flushing face, 'that I could earn some money, and—and—help them?'

'That is what I mean.'

'You mean,' she persisted rather proudly, 'that to oblige you, some friend would buy them, and——'

'Good heavens! do you know me no better than to suppose that I would sell what you had given me! What a cruel thing to say!'

'I beg your pardon!' she murmured hastily, and overcome with confusion; 'but—but—I do not see how——'

'You can paint others as good as these,'

he said, unable to resist smiling at her simplicity. 'When these have been seen and admired——'

'But you must not tell who did them—oh, you must not do that.'

'Again I implore you to trust my discretion and my honour.'

'I feel afraid—I dare say it is very silly,' she said.

'It is very natural, but it is needless,' he answered, thinking at the same time that it was very sweet, very bewitching, and that he was supremely fortunate, to be the confidant of this secret.

'And you would not be ashamed—you do not think that a woman—a lady—is any the worse if she has to work hard?' she began tremulously.

'All honest work is good; and when it is undertaken from certain motives, it is more than good, it is sacred. Yours would be sacred. And besides,' he added, in a lower, deeper tone, 'nothing that your hands

touched could be anything but beautiful, and pure, and worthy of honour.'

Her face was downcast; her eyes filled with a rush of tears; her fingers fluttered nervously about the petals of the flower that was stuck in her belt. She was unused to praise of this kind, utterly a stranger to compliments of any kind, from men; overwhelmed with the discovery that some one had found something in her to admire, to reverence.

'When you are a well-known artist,' he added, in a rather lighter tone, 'with more commissions and more money and fame than you know what to do with, do not quite forget me.'

'If ever—if ever I do anything—as you seem to think I may—it will all be owing to you.'

This assurance, with the wavering look, the hesitating voice with which it was made, was unutterably sweet to Randulf.

'Then I may keep the sketch?' he said.

'Yes, please,' said Delphine.

He rolled them both up, and they went downstairs to the hall, where they found the two other girls waiting for them.

Randulf made his adieux, saying he hoped he might call again, and ask how Mrs. Conisbrough was. Then he went away, and Judith led the way into the parlour.

* * * * *

Aglionby, left alone with Mrs. Conisbrough, while Judith went to call her sisters, sat in the recess of the window which looked into the street, and waited for what appeared to him a very long time, until at last he heard steps coming downstairs and voices in the hall. He had a quick and sensitive ear, and besides that, Randulf's tones with their southern accent, and their indolent drawl, were sufficiently remarkable in that land of rough burr and Yorkshire broadness. So then, argued Bernard within himself, this young fellow was admitted as an intimate guest into the house which he was not

allowed to enter, despite his cousinship, despite his earnest pleadings, despite his almost passionate desire to do what was right and just towards these his kinswomen. He had told Judith that he would comply with her behest. He was going to keep at the distance she required him to maintain, after this one interview, that is. But he felt that the price he paid was a hard and a long one. His joy in his inheritance was robbed of all its brightness. He sat and waited, while Mrs. Conisbrough leaned back and fanned herself, and observed:

'Why, that is Randulf Danesdale's voice. He is always here. Where can they have been?'

Mrs. Conisbrough, as may already have been made apparent, was not a wise woman, nor a circumspect one. Perhaps she wished to show Aglionby that they had people of position amongst their friends. Perhaps she wished to flourish the fact before him, that Sir Gabriel Danesdale's only son and

heir was a great ally of her daughters. Be that as it may, her words had the effect of putting Bernard into a state of almost feverish vexation and mortification. It did appear most hard, most galling, and most inexplicable that against his name alone, of all others, *tabu* should be writ so large. He saw Randulf go down the steps, with a smile on his handsome face, and a little white roll in his hand, and saw him take his way up the market-place, towards the inn where he had left his horse, and then the door of the parlour was opened, and his 'cousins' came in.

There were greetings and introductions. He found two lovely girls, either of them more actually beautiful than her who was his oldest acquaintance. Beside their pronounced and almost startling beauty, her grave and pensive dignity and statuesque handsomeness looked cold, no doubt, but he had seen the fiery heart that burnt beneath that outward calm.

He was much enchanted with the beauty

of these two younger girls; he understood the charm of Delphine's shadowy, sylph-like loveliness; of Rhoda's upright figure, handsome features, and dauntless grey eyes. He talked to them. They kept strictly to commonplaces; no dangerous topics were even mentioned. Aglionby, when they were all seated, and talking thus smoothly and conventionally, still felt in every fibre the potent spell exercised over his spirit by *one* present. Judith sat almost silent, and he did not speak to her—for some reason he felt unable to do so.

All the time he was talking to the others, he felt intensely conscious that soon he must leave the house—for ever, ran the fiat—and in it he must leave behind him—what? Without his knowing it, the obstacle which prevented his answering that question, even to himself, was that viewless but real fact—Miss Vane.

By-and-by, he rose; for to stay would have been needless and, indeed, intrusive under the

circumstances. He shook hands with Mrs. Conisbrough, expressing his hope that she would soon be, as he bluntly put it, 'all right again.' He might not say, like Randulf Danesdale, that he would call again in a few days, and inquire after her. Then, with each of the girls, a handshake—with Judith last. When it came to that point, and her fingers were within his hand, it was as if a spell were lifted, and the touch thrilled him through from head to foot, through brain and heart and soul, and every inch of flesh! electrically, potently, and as it never had done—as no touch ever had done before. He looked at her; whether his look compelled an answering one from her—whether she would have looked in any case, who shall say? Only, she did look, and then Bernard knew, despite her composed countenance, and steady hand and eye—he knew that it was not he only who was thrilled.

'Good-afternoon, Miss Conisbrough,' and 'Good-afternoon, Mr. Aglionby,' sounded

delightfully original, and pregnant with meaning. Not another word was uttered by either. He dropped her hand, and turned away, and could have laughed aloud in the bitterness of his heart.

'I'll open the door for you, Mr. Aglionby,' came Rhoda's ringing voice; and, defying ceremony, she skipped before him into the hall.

'We've only one retainer,' she pursued, 'and she is generally doing those things which she ought not to be doing, when she is wanted. Is that Bluebell you have in the brougham? Yes! Hey, old girl! Bluebell, Bluebell!'

She patted the mare's neck, who tossed her head, and in her own way laughed with joy at the greeting. With a decidedly friendly nod to Aglionby, she ran into the house again, and the carriage drove away.

'Well?' cried Miss Rhoda, rushing into the parlour, panting.

Judith was not there. Doubtless she had

gone to prepare that cup of tea for which Mrs. Conisbrough pined.

'Well?' retorted Delphine.

'I like him,' chanted Rhoda, whirling round the room. 'He's grave and dark, and fearfully majestic, like a Spaniard; but he smiles like an Englishman, and looks at you like a person with a clear conscience. That's a good combination, I say; but, all the same, I wish Uncle Aglionby had not been so fascinated with him as to leave him *all* his money.'

To which aspiration no one made any reply.





CHAPTER VIII.

AN OLD WIFE'S TALE.

THE evening at Yoresett House passed with its usual monotonous quietness. Mrs. Conisbrough, weary, and dejected too, now that she was at home again—now that Aglionby had gone away, without saying one word of coming again, without holding out a single hope that he would deal generously, or, as it seemed to her, even justly, by her and hers—went to bed early, hoping to find rest and forgetfulness. She took a stronger dose than usual of her calming mixture, and was soon asleep. Rhoda was not long in following her example.

The two elder girls were left alone. They chatted in a desultory manner, with long pauses, about all the trivial events which had happened during Judith's absence. If there were anything remarkable about their conversation it was, that neither Bernard Aglionby's name, nor that of Randulf Danesdale, was so much as mentioned. By degrees their voices ceased entirely; silence had fallen upon them for some time before they at last went to their bedrooms. How different the feelings which caused or prompted this silence in the one girl and the other! Delphine's silence was the cloak which hid a happiness tremulous but not uncertain. Looking round her horizon she beheld a most brilliant star of the morning rising clear, bright, and prepared to run a long course. She was content to be silent, and contemplate it.

With Judith it was otherwise. She felt the depression under which she had lately suffered, but which had been somewhat dissipated

by the strong excitement of the event which had taken place at Scar Foot. She felt this depression rush over her again with irresistible force, sweeping her as it were from her feet, submerging her beneath its dark and melancholy wave. Turn which way she would she could see nothing but darkness in her prospects—in the prospects of them all. Hitherto she had fought against this depression; had despised herself for feeling it; and, since her uncle's will had left them penniless, tried to console herself with the reflection that she was no worse off than before, but rather a little better, for that now she might justly go to her mother and claim as a right to be allowed to seek work. To-night she did not feel that consolation; she thought of Bernard Aglionby's eyes, and of the touch of his hand as he had said, 'Good-afternoon, Miss Conisbrough,' and the thought, the recollection, made her throw down her work and pant as if she felt suffocated and longed for fresh air.

By-and-by she went to bed, and, more wearied than she had known she was, soon fell asleep, and had one of those blessed dreams which descend upon our slumbers sometimes when care is blackest and life is hardest, when our weirds, that we have to dree out, look intolerable to us in our weariness and grief. It was a long, rambling, confused dream, incoherent but happy. When she awoke from it, she could recall no particular incident in it; she did but experience a feeling of happiness and lightness of heart, as if the sun had suddenly burst forth through dark clouds, which she had long been hoping vainly would disperse. And vaguely connected with this happier feeling, the shadow, as it were, the eidolon, or image, of Bernard Aglionby, dim recollections of Shennamere, of moonlight, of words spoken, and then of a long, dreamful silence, which supervened.

She lay half-awake, trying, scarce consciously, to thread together these scattered beads of thought, of fancy, and of hope.

Then by degrees she remembered where she was, and the truth of it all. But cheered, and undaunted still, she rose from her bed, and dressed, and went downstairs, ready to face her day with a steadfast mien.

The morning seemed to pass more quickly and cheerfully than usual. Judith was employed in some household work; that is, her hands were so employed; her head was busy with schemes of launching herself upon the world—of work, in short. She was reflecting upon the best means of finding something to do, which should give her enough money to let her learn how to do something more. Never before had the prospect seemed so near and so almost within her grasp.

In the afternoon Delphine shut herself up in her den, to paint, and to brood, no doubt, she too, over the future and its golden possibilities. For, when we are nineteen, the future is so huge, and its hugeness is so cheerful and sunny. Rhoda, inspired with youthful energy, was seen to put on an old and

rough-looking pair of gloves, and on being questioned, said she was going to do up the garden. Thus Judith and Mrs. Conisbrough were left alone in the parlour, and Judith offered to read to her mother. The proposal was accepted. Judith had read for some time of the fortunes and misfortunes attending the careers of Darcy Latimer and Alan Fairfax, when, looking up, she saw that her mother was asleep. She laid the book down, and before taking up her work, contemplated the figure and countenance of the sleeping woman. That figure, shapely even now, had once been, as Judith had again and again heard, one of the tallest, straightest, most winsome figures in all Danesdale. Her mother's suitors and admirers had been numerous, if not all eligible, and that countenance, now shrunken, with the anxiously corrugated brow, and the mouth drawn down in lines of care, discontent, and disappointment, had been the face of a beauty. How often had she not heard the words from old servants and old acquaintance,

'Eh, bairn, but your mother was a bonny woman!'

'Poor mother!' murmured Judith, looking at her, with her elbow on her knee, and her chin in her hand, 'yours has been a sad, hard life, after all. I should like to make it gladder for you, and I can and will do so, even without Uncle Aglionby's money, if you will only wait, and have patience, and trust me to walk alone.'

Then her thoughts flew like lightning, to Scar Foot, to Shennamere, to the days from the Saturday to the Wednesday, which she had just passed there, and which had opened out for her such a new world.

Thus she had sat for some little time in silence, and over all the house there was a stillness which was almost intense, when the handle of the door was softly turned, and looking up, Judith beheld their servant Louisa looking in, and evidently wishful to speak with her. She held up her hand, with a warning gesture, looking at her mother, and

then rising, went out of the room, closing the door behind her as softly as it had been opened.

'What is it, Louisa?'

'Please, Miss Conisbrough, it's an old woman called Martha Paley, and she asked to see the mistress.'

'Mrs. Paley, oh, I know her. I'll go to her, Louisa, and if you have done your work, you can go upstairs and get dressed, while I talk to her, for she will not sit anywhere but in the kitchen.'

Louisa willingly took her way upstairs, and the young lady went into the kitchen.

'Well, Martha, and where do you come from?' she inquired. 'It is long since we saw you.'

It was a very aged, decent-looking woman who had seated herself in the rocking-chair at one side of the hearth. Martha Paley had been in old John Aglionby's service years ago. When old age incapacitated her, and after her old man's death, she had yielded to

the urgent wishes of a son and his wife, living at Bradford, and had taken up her abode with them. Occasionally she revisited her old haunts in the Dale, the scenes of her youth and matronhood, and Judith conjectured that she must be on such a visit now.

'Ay, a long time it is, my dear,' said the old woman; she was a native of Swaledale, and spoke in a dialect so broad, as certainly to be unintelligible to all save those who, like Judith Conisbrough, knew and loved its every idiom, and accordingly, in mercy to the reader, her vernacular is translated. 'I have been staying at John Heseltine's at the Ridgeway farm, nigh to th' Hawes.'

'Ah then, that is why you have not been to see us before, I suppose, as it is a good distance away. But now you are here, Martha, you will take off your bonnet, and stay tea?'

'I cannot, my bairn, thank you. John's son Edmund has driven me here, so far, in his gig, and he's bound to do some errands

in the town, and then to drive me to Leyburn, where my son will meet me and take me home next day.'

'I see. And how are you? You look pretty well.'

'I'm very well indeed, God be thanked, for such an old, old woman as I am. I have reason to be content. But your mother, bairn—how's your mother?'

'She has been ill, I am very sorry to say, and she is sleeping now. I daren't awaken her, Martha, or I would; but her heart is weak, you know, and we are always afraid to startle her or give her a shock.'

'Ay, ay! Well, you'll perhaps do as well as her. I've had something a deal on my mind, ever since Sunday, when I heard of the old Squire's death, and his will. I reckon that would be a shock to you.'

'It was,' replied Judith, briefly.

'Ay, indeed! And it's quite true that he has left his money to his grandson?'

'Quite true.'

'Judith, my bairn, that was not right.'

'I suppose my uncle thought he had a right to do what he chose with his own, Martha.'

'In a way, he might have, but not after what he'd said to your mother. People have rights, but there's duties too, my dear, duties, and there's honesty and truth. His duty was to deal fairly by those he had encouraged to trust in him, and he died with a lie in his mouth when he led your mother to expect his money, and then left it away. But there's the Scripture, and it's the strongest of all,' she went on, somewhat incoherently, as it seemed to Judith, while she raised her withered hand with a gesture which had in it something almost imposing; 'and *it* says, "for unto him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."'

'It is a very true Scripture, Martha, I think —so true that it will scarcely do for us to set ourselves against it in this case. The will is

a valid one. Have you seen young Mr. Aglionby?'

'Nay,' she answered, with some vigour; 'when I heard o' what had happened, I couldn't bear to go near the place. And it's the first time I've been in th' Dale without visiting Scar Foot, the bonny place—"Fair Scar Foot" the verses call it.'

'I think that is a pity. You would have found Mr. Aglionby very kind, and most anxious to do all that is right and just.'

'I think, for sure, he ought to be. Why not? It's easy to be just when you have lands and money all round, just as it is hard for an empty sack to stand upright . . . He must be terrible rich, my bairn—that young man.'

'He is as rich as my uncle was, I suppose. He was not rich before; he was very poor—as poor as we are.'

Old Mrs. Paley shook her head, and said decidedly:

'That can't be, honey! For when his

father—poor Ralph—died, his mother's rich relations promised to adopt him; and they were to look after him, and see that he wanted for nothing. So that with money from them, and the old Squire's money too, he must be a very rich man.'

Such, but more rudely expressed, was old Martha's argument.

Judith felt a wave of sickly dread and terror sweep over her heart. It made her feel cold and faint. This rumour confronted her everywhere, this tale without a word of truth in it. Aglionby's words had been explicit enough. On his mother's side he had no rich relations; never had possessed even a rich connection. Yet her own impressions, strong, though she knew not whence they were derived; her own mother's words about 'Bernarda' and what Bernarda had said (words spoken as she awoke from her fainting fit); and now old Martha Paley—on all sides there seemed to be an impression, nay, more, a conviction that he had been adopted by these mythical rich

relations. Who had at first originated that report? Whence had it sprung? She knew, though she had not owned it to herself—she knew, though she had called herself all manner of ill-names for daring even to guess such a thing. It was because she knew that she had refused Aglionby's overtures.

For a moment or two, cowardice was nearly gaining the victory. Mrs. Paley was an old, feeble woman; Judith could easily turn her thoughts upon another track; the worst need never be stated. But another feeling stronger than this shrinking from the truth, urged her to learn it, and she said:

'Indeed, and how do you know this, Martha?'

'How do I know it, bairn? Why, from your own mother's lips, as who else should I know it from? Ay, and she cried and sobbed, she did so, when she brought the news. You know, it was like in this way that it happened. When Ralph got married, and for long before, I was housekeeper at Scar Foot. I well re-

member it all, and the old Squire's fury, and the names he called the woman who had married his son; "a low, penniless jade," he called her, ay, and worse than that. He always meant Ralph to have your mother, you know. She was ever a favourite with him. Whether that would have come to anything in any case, I don't know; for whatever she might have done, Ralph said much and more, that he wouldn't wed her. He went off to London, and married his wife there. The news came, and the Squire was furious. How he raged! He soon forbade Ralph the house, and cut off his allowance, and refused to see him or hear of him. Two or three years passed; your mother was married and lived in this house, which had been her mother's before her. I think the old Squire's conscience began to prick, for he got uneasy about his son, and at last would have sent for him, I believe, but while he was making up his mind Ralph died, and then it was too late. For a time it fairly knocked the old

man down. Then he came round, and began to think that he would like to have the boy, and he even made up his mind to make some sort of terms with the wife so as to get the boy into his own care, and "bring him up an Aglionby, and not a vagabond," as he said. It was a great descent for his pride, Miss Judith. He took counsel with your mother, and sent her to Irkford, where Mrs. Ralph lived, that great big town, you know. I've never been there, but they do say that it's wonderful for size and for dirt. He sent her there to see the mother and try to persuade her to let him have the child for the best part of the year, and she was to have it for the rest, and it was to be brought up like a gentleman, and sent to college, and then it was to have all his money when he died, same as if its father had never crossed him.

'Your mother—she was not a widow then, you know, nor for many a year after—she was away about three days. When she came back she came alone. The old Squire was

as white as a sheet with expectation and excitement. I was by at the time, and I saw and heard it all. He said, "Where's the boy?" in a very quiet, strange kind of voice. "Oh, uncle," your mother said, "she's an awful woman—she's like a tigress." Then she cried and sobbed, and said it had been too much for her nerves; it had nearly killed her. And she told him how Mrs. Ralph had got into a fury, and said she would never be parted for a day from her child, and that she spurned his offer.

'The old Squire said, with his grim little laugh, that perhaps when she was starving, she would not be so ready to spurn. "Oh, she won't starve," your mother said; "she has plenty of rich relations, and that is partly what makes her so independent. Ralph has left her the child's sole guardian. She scorns and spurns us, and I believe she would like to see us humbled in the dust before her." Then the old Squire let his hatred loose against his son's wife. With

his terrible look that he could put on at times, he sat down beside your mother (she was flung on a sofa, you know, half-fainting), and he bade her tell him all about it. He questioned and she answered, and she was trembling like a leaf all the time. He bade me stay where I was, as witness. And at last, when he had heard it all out, he swore a fearful oath, and took heaven and us to witness that from henceforth, as long as he lived, he would have nothing to do with his grandchild. It might starve, he said, or die, or rot, or anything its mother chose, for aught he cared—*he* had done with it for ever. It was terrible to hear him. And from that day, none of us dared name the child to him. He spent a deal of his time at Yoresett House, with your mother. I heard him many a time tell her, she and hers were all the children he had. And after your father died, he went on purpose to tell her not to be uneasy, but to leave him to do things his own way, and that you children should

thrust that brat out of Scar Foot at last. And now he goes and leaves it all his money. Eh, my bairn—that was very wrong.'

Judith, when she answered, spoke, and indeed felt, quite calm : the very hugeness of the effort she had to make in order to speak at all, kept her calm and quiet. She had never even conceived of anything like the dreadful shame she felt as she said :

'It is a terrible story, Martha. It is very well that you told it to me instead of to my mother, for she is not strong enough to bear having it raked up again. Have you'—her voice almost died away upon her lips—'have you related it to anyone else?'

'Nay, not I! I thought I'd just see Mistress Conisbrough, and ask her if there was nothing to be done. If she was to speak to some lawyer—some clever man—and some of them *is* so clever, you know, happen he might be able to set aside the will.'

'That is what she thought of at first,' said Judith, strenuously keeping her mind fixed

upon the subject; battling hard to keep in restraint the sickly fear at her heart lest any of the unsuspecting ones around them should by chance come in and interrupt the interview. 'But Mr. Whaley told her it would not be of the very slightest use. And—and —Martha, I think you are very fond of us all, are you not?'

She came near to the old woman, and knelt beside her, with her hands clasped upon her knee, and she looked up into Martha's face.

'Ay, my bairn, I am so.' She passed her withered hand over Judith's glossy brown braids. 'I am so fond of ye all that I cannot abide to see ye cast out by a usurper.'

'Then if you really care for us, please, Martha, say nothing more to anyone about this, will you? I will tell you why. We have reason to think that Mr. Aglionby's relations were not really so rich as—as was represented; or if they were, they must have changed their minds about adopting him, for

he was *very* poor, really, when his grandfather found him. And as it would not be of the least use to dispute the will, we want to keep it all quiet, don't you see? and to make no disturbance about it. Will you promise, Martha?'

'Ay, if you'll promise that if ever I could be of use by telling all about it, as I've told it to you, now, that you'll send for me, eh, bairn?'

'Oh, I promise that, yes.'

'Then I promise you what you want. It's none such a pleasant thing that one should want to be raking it up at every turn, to all one's friends and neighbours.'

Judith felt her heart grow cold and faint at the images conjured up by these words of the old woman, who went on, after a pause, during which her thoughts seemed to dwell upon the past, 'Do you know him, my bairn, this young man?'

'Yes,' replied Judith, a flood of colour rushing tumultuously over her pale face.

The question was sudden ; the emotion was, for the moment, uncontrollable. Her clear eyes, which had been fixed on old Martha's face, wavered, sank.

Though Mrs. Paley was a withered old woman of eighty, she could read a certain language on a human face as glibly as any young maid of eighteen.

'You do ? There's another reason for my holding my tongue. You say he's considerate, and wishful to do right. Is he reasonable, or is he one of them that have eyes, but see not ? If he *has* eyes, he will want never to lose sight of you again. If you and he were to wed—eh, what a grand way of making all straight, and healing all enmities, and a way after the Lord's own heart, too.'

A little shudder ran through Judith. She did not tell old Martha that Aglionby was already engaged ; or Mrs. Paley's indignation would perhaps have loosed her tongue, in other quarters than this, and Judith wished above all things, and at almost any price, to

secure her silence. She knew now that had Bernard been free as air; had he loved her and her alone, and told her so, and wooed her with all the ardour of which he was capable—after what she had just now heard she would have to say him nay, cost her what it might; a spoiled life, a broken heart, or what you will.

She rose from her knees, smiled a chilly little attempt at a smile, and said:

'I'm afraid you are a match-maker, Martha,' and then, to her unspeakable relief, she heard the sound of wheels. It was John Heseltine's son Edmund with the gig, coming to fetch Martha away.

The old woman did not ask to see the other girls. The story she had been telling had sent her thoughts wandering back to old times; she had forgotten Judith's sisters, who were to her things of yesterday. When she departed, Judith shook her withered old hand; promised to deliver her messages to her mother, led her to the door: saw her

seated in the gig, and driven off, sure that she would keep the promise she had given. And thus old Martha Paley disappears from these pages.

Judith returned to the house, and stood in the hall a moment or two, then mechanically took her way upstairs, along the passage, to her own bedroom. She sat down, and folding her hands upon her knee, she began to think. Painfully, shrinkingly, but laboriously, she went in her mind over every detail of this horrible story. She felt a vague kind of hope that perhaps, if it all came to be compared and sifted, the particulars might be found incongruous; she might be unable to make them agree with one another, and so have a pretext for rejecting it. But, as she conned over each one, she found that they fitted together only too well—both her own vague, almost formless suspicions, and the tangible facts which explained them.

Her great-uncle had had an interview with his grandson; she exactly understood how,

talking to Bernard about what he supposed to be his true position, he had been enlightened, and that with a shock. He must have restrained his wrath so far as not to reveal to Aglionby what he had discovered; he had, as he thought, had pity upon her mother and her mother's daughters. She remembered their journey home from Irkford, and how her uncle's strangely absent and ungenial manner had struck her, and chilled her. Then, while she and her sisters were out, on the following morning, he had visited her mother. She could form no idea of what had passed at that interview; it must have been a painful one, for her mother had not mentioned it, but had been left shaken and ill by it. Next, Judith's own interview with her uncle; his extraordinary reception of her; his fury, unaccountable to her at the time, but which was now only too comprehensible; his sinister accusations of herself and her mother, as being leagued together in some plot—some scheme to fleece and hoodwink him;

now she could interpret this fiery writing on the wall, clearly enough. Her return home; the storm; the apparition of Mr. Whaley driving through it and the night, towards Scar Foot; the hastily executed will; the miserable scene when its contents were made known; her mother's sudden fear and cowering down before Aglionby; her broken words on recovering unconsciousness—that repetition of the lie told twenty years before, and more. Those words had first aroused her suspicion, her vague fear that all was not so clear and straightforward as it should be.

Now came old Martha, like a finger of some inspired interpreter, pointing out the meaning of each strange occurrence, throwing a flood of light over all, by her grim story of an old man's imperious will thwarted—of a young man's obstinate weakness; of a woman's yielding to temptation, and telling lies for gain. Each detail now seemed to dovetail with hideous accuracy into its neighbour, until the naked truth, the damnable and crushing

whole, seemed to start up and stand before her, stark and threatening.

She feebly tried to ignore, or to escape from the inferences which came crowding into her mind—tried piteously not to see the consequences of her mother's sin. That was useless; she had a clear understanding, and a natural turn for logic. Such qualities always come into play at crises, or in emergencies, and she could not escape from their power now. Sitting still, and outwardly composed, her eyes fixed musingly upon a particular spot in the pattern of a rug which was spread near her bedside—her brain was very active. It was as if her will were powerless and paralysed, while her heart was arraigned before her brain, which, with cold and pitiless accuracy, pointed out to that quivering criminal not all, but some portion of what was implied in this sin of her mother; some of the results involved by it in the lives of herself, her children, and her victims.

As to Mrs. Conisbrough's original motives

for such a course of action, Judith did not stop long to consider them. Probably it had occurred to her mother, during that far-back journey to Irkford, that a great deal of power had been entrusted to her, that she did not see why she was to have all the trouble, and Mrs. Ralph Aglionby and her boy all the benefits of this tiresome and troublesome negotiation. Then (according to Judith's knowledge of her mother's character) she had toyed and dallied with the idea, instead of strangling it ere it was fully born. It had grown as such ideas do grow, after the first horror they inspire has faded—'like Titan infants'—and Mrs. Conisbrough had not the nature which can struggle with Titans and overcome them. Judith surmised that her mother had, probably, gone on telling herself that, of course, she was going to be honest, until the moment came for deciding: she must have so represented her uncle's message to Bernarda, as to rouse her indignation, and cause her indignantly to refuse his overtures

Then she had probably reflected that, after all, it could soon be madé right; she would be the peacemaker, and so lay them both under obligations to her. And then the time had come to be honest; to confront the old Squire and tell him that she had not been quite successful with Ralph's widow, but that a little explanation would soon make matters right. No doubt she intended to do it, but she did the very reverse, and those sobs, and tears, and tremblings, of which old Martha had spoken, testified to the intense nervous strain she had gone through, and to the violent reaction which had set in when at last the die had been irrevocably cast.

Her lie had been believed implicitly. The wrong path had been made delightfully smooth and easy for her; the right one had been filled with obstacles, and made rough and rugged.

Something like this might, or might not, have been the sequence of the steps in which her mother had fallen. Judith did not con-

sider that; what took possession of her mind was the fact that her mother, who passed for a woman whose heart was stronger than her judgment, a woman with a gentle disposition, hating to give pain—that such a character could act as she had acted towards Bernarda and her boy. It seemed to Judith that what her mother had done had been much the same as if one had met a child in a narrow path, had pushed it aside, and marched onwards, not looking behind, but leaving the child, either to recover its footing, if lucky, or, if not, to fall over the precipice and linger in torture at the bottom, till death should be kind enough to release it.

'We should say that the person was an inhuman monster who did that,' she reflected. 'Yet she knew that if Mrs. Ralph Aglionby's health gave way, if she were incapacitated for work, or work failed, she must starve or go to the workhouse, and the child with her. I cannot see that she was less inhuman than

the other person would have been. . . . She has always appeared tranquil; the only thing that troubled her was an occasional fear lest Uncle Aglionby should not leave his property exactly as she desired. Was she tranquil because she knew Mrs. Aglionby to be in decent circumstances? or was it because she knew that she was safe from discovery, and that whatever happened to *them*, she was secure of the money?'

Judith's face was haggard as she arrived at this point in the chain of her mental argument. It would not do to go into that question. She hastily turned aside from it, and began an attempt to unravel some of the intricacies which her discovery must cause in the future for her sisters and herself. She felt a grim pleasure in the knowledge that in the past they had gained nothing from their mother's sin. They had rather lost. In the future, how were they to demean themselves?

'We can never marry,' she decided. 'As

honest women, we can never let any man marry us without telling him the truth, and it is equally impossible for us deliberately to expose our mother's shame. That is decided, and nothing in the heavens above or the earth beneath can ever alter that. We can work, I suppose, and try to hide our heads; make ourselves as obscure as possible. That is the only way. And we can live, and wait, and die at last, and there will be an end of us, and a good thing too.'

She pondered for a long time upon this prospect; tried to look it in the face, 'Je veux regarder mon destin en face,' she might have said with Maxime, 'the poor young man,' 'pour lui ôter son air de spectre.' And by dint of courage she partially succeeded, even in that dark hour. She succeeded in convincing herself that she could meet her lot, and battle with it hand to hand. She did more; she conjured up a dream in which she saw how joy might be extracted from this woe—not that it ever

would be—but she could picture circumstances under which it might be. For example, she reflected:

'They say there is a silver lining to every cloud. I know what would line my cloud with silver—if I could ever do Bernard Aglionby some marvellous and unheard-of service; procure him some wonderful good which should make the happiness of his whole life, and then, when he felt that he owed everything to me, if I could go on my knees to him, and tell him all; see him smile, and hear him say, "It is forgiven," then I could live or die, and be happy, whichever I had to do.'

A calm and beautiful smile had broken over the fixed melancholy of her countenance. It faded away again as she thought, 'And that is just what I shall never be allowed to do. Does he not say himself that there *is* no forgiveness; for every sin the punishment must be borne. And I must bear mine.'

The dusk had fallen, the air was cold with the autumnal coldness of October. Judith, after deciding that she might keep her secret to herself for to-night, went downstairs to meet her mother and sisters with what cheer she might.





CHAPTER IX.

AGLIONBY'S DÉBUT.

AGLIONBY, casting one last look after Rhoda's figure as it disappeared, turned his horse's head, and drove homewards, dreamily. Not a fortnight—not one short fourteen days had elapsed since he had been summoned hither—and how much had not taken place since! He could not have believed, had anyone told him earlier, that he had so much flexibility in his character as to be susceptible of undergoing the change which certainly had taken place in him during that short time. In looking back upon his Irkford life, it appeared like an existence which he had led,

say ten years ago, and from which he was for ever severed. The men and women who had moved and lived in it, trooped by, in his mind, like figures in a dream; so much so, indeed, that he presently dismissed them as one does dismiss a recollected dream from his head, and his thoughts reverted to the present; went back to the parlour at Yoresett House, to Mrs. Conisbrough's figure reclining in her easy-chair, and to the figures of his three 'cousins.' All over again, and keenly as ever, he felt the pain and mortification he had experienced from Judith's fiat as to their future terms.

'By George!' he muttered, 'I wonder I ever submitted to it! I can't understand it —only she can subdue me with a look, when anyone else would only rouse me to more determined opposition.'

Arrived at Scar Foot, he entered the house, and in the hall found more cards on the table, of neighbouring gentry who had called upon him. He picked them up, and read them, and

smiled a smile such as in his former days of bitterness had often crossed his face. Throwing himself into an easy-chair, he lighted his pipe, and gave himself up to reflection.

'I must decide on something,' he thought. 'In fairness to Lizzie, I must decide. Am I going to live here, or am I not? I should think the question was rather, "*Can* I? *will* Lizzie?" Of course I must keep the house on, here; but I know Lizzie would not be happy to live here. Two houses? one here and one at Irkford? How would that do? Whether Lizzie liked it or not, I could always fly here for refuge, when I wanted to dream and be quiet. I could come here alone, and fish—and when I was tired of that, I might go to Irkford, and help a little in political affairs. Perhaps some day I might catch . . . my cousin Judith . . . in a softer mood, and get her to hear reason.'

He looked around the darkening room, and started. There was the soft rustle of a dress—a footfall—a hand on the door—his eyes

strained eagerly towards it. Judith always used to come down in the twilight. She enters. It is Mrs. Aveson, come to inquire at what time he would like to dine. He gives her the required information, and sinks discontentedly back into his chair.

'The fact is,' he mentally resumed, 'I am dazed with my new position; I don't know what I want and what I don't want. I must have some advice, and that from the only person whose advice I ever listened to. I must write to Aunt Margaret.'

(Aunt Margaret was his mother's sister, Mrs. Bryce, a widow.)

'I believe,' he then began to think, 'that if I did what was best—what was right, and my duty—I should set things in train for having this old place freshened up. I wonder what Judith would say to that—she has never known it other than it is now—and then I should go to Irkford, tell Lizzie what I'd done; ask her to choose a house there, and to fix the wedding, and I should get it

all over as soon as possible, and settle down . . . and that is exactly what I don't want to do . . . I wish I knew some one to whom I could tell what I thought about my cousins; some one who could answer my questions about them. I feel so in the dark about them. I cannot imagine Judith asking things she was not warranted in asking—and yet, blindly to submit to her in such an important matter——'

He spent a dreary evening, debating, wondering, and considering—did nothing that had about it even the appearance of decisiveness, except to write to Mrs. Bryce, and ask her to sacrifice herself and come into the country, to give him her company, and her counsel, 'both of which I sorely need,' wrote this young man with the character for being very decided and quick in his resolutions. As to other things, he could make up his mind to nothing, and arrived at no satisfactory conclusion. He went to bed feeling very much out of temper, and he too dreamed a dream, in which reality and fantasy were strangely

mingled. He seemed to see himself in the Irkford theatre, with 'Diplomacy' being played. He was in the lower circle, in evening dress, and thought to himself, with a grim little smile, how easily one adapted oneself to changed circumstances. Beside him a figure was seated. He had a vague idea that it was a woman's figure — his mother's—and he turned eagerly towards it. But no! It was his grandfather, who was glaring angrily towards a certain point in the upper circle, and Bernard also directed his glance towards that point, and saw, seated side by side, his friend Percy Golding and Lizzie Vane. They looked jeeringly towards him, and he, for some reason, or for none—like most dream reasons—felt a sudden fury and a sudden fear seize him. He strove to rise, but could not. His fear and his anger were growing to a climax, and they at last seemed to overpower him, when he saw Mrs. Conisbrough suddenly appear behind Percy and Lizzie, laughing malignantly. It

then seemed to him that in the midst of his fury he glanced from her face towards a large clock, which he was not in the least surprised to see was fixed in the very middle of the dress circle.

'Ten minutes past ten,' so he read the fingers; and his terror increased, as he thought to himself, 'Impossible! It must be much later!' And he turned to the figure of his grandfather by his side, perfectly conscious though he was that it was a phantom.

'Shall I go to them?' he inquired.

'Yes,' replied the apparition.

'But the time!' continued Aglionby, frantically, and again looked towards the clock.

'Ten minutes to two,' he read it this time, and thought, 'Of course! a much more appropriate time!'

And turning once more to the phantom, he put the question to it solemnly,

'*Shall I go to them?*'

'N—no,' was the reluctant response. With that, it seemed as if the horror reached its

climax, and came crashing down upon him, and with a struggle, in the midst of which he heard the mocking laughter of Lizzie, Percy, and Mrs. Conisbrough, he awoke, in a cold perspiration.

The moon was shining into the room, with a clear, cold light. Aglionby, shuddering faintly, drew his watch from under his pillow, and glanced at it. The fingers pointed to ten minutes before two.

'Bah! a nightmare!' he muttered, shaking himself together again, and, turning over, he tried once more to sleep, but in vain. The dream and its disagreeable impression remained with him in spite of all his efforts to shake them off. The figure which, he felt, had been wanting to convert it from a horror into a pleasant vision, was that of Judith Conisbrough. But after all, he was glad her shape had not intruded into such an insane phantasmagoria.

The following afternoon he drove over to Danesdale Castle, to return the call of Sir

Gabriel and his son. It was the first time he had penetrated to that part of the Dale, and he was struck anew with the exceeding beauty of the country, with the noble forms of the hills, and, above all, with the impressive aspect of Danesdale Castle itself.

There was an old Danesdale Castle—a grim, half-ruined pile, standing 'four-square to the four winds of heaven,' with a tower at each corner. It was a landmark and a beacon for miles around, standing as it did on a rise, and proudly looking across the Dale. It was famous in historical associations; it had been the prison of a captive queen, whose chamber window, high up in the third story, commanded a broad view of lovely lowland country, wild moors, bare-backed fells. Many a weary hour must she have spent there, looking hopelessly across those desolate hills, and envying the wild birds which had liberty to fly across them. All that was over now, and changed. 'Castle Danesdale,' as it was called, was nearly a ruin; a portion of it was

inhabited by some of Sir Gabriel's tenantry ; a big room in it was used for a ball for the said tenantry in winter.

The Danesdales had built themselves a fine commodious mansion of red brick, in Queen Anne's time, in a noble park nearer the river, and there they now lived in great state and comfort, and allowed the four winds of heaven to battle noisily and wuther wearily around the ragged towers of the house of their fathers.

Aglionby found that Sir Gabriel was at home, and as he entered, Randulf crossed the hall, saw him, and his languid face lighted with a smile of satisfaction.

'Well met!' said he, shaking his hand. 'Come into the drawing-room, and I'll introduce you to my sister. Tell Sir Gabriel,' he added to the servant, and Aglionby followed him.

'For your pleasure or displeasue, I may inform you that you have been a constant subject of conversation at my sister's kettle-

drums for the last week,' Randulf found time to say to him, as they approached the drawing-room, 'and as there is one of those ceremonials in full swing at the present moment, I would not be you.'

'You don't speak in a way calculated to add to my natural ease and grace of manner,' murmured Bernard, with a somewhat sardonic smile, a gleam of mirth in his eyes. Sooth to say, he had very vague notions as to what a kettledrum might be; and he certainly was not prepared for the spectacle which greeted him, of some seven or eight ladies, young, old, and middle-aged, seated about the room, with Miss Danesdale dispensing tea at a table in the window-recess.

An animated conversation was going on; so animated that Randulf and Aglionby, coming in by a door behind the company, were not immediately perceived except by one or two persons. But by the time that Mr. Danesdale had piloted his victim to the side of the tea-table, every tongue was silent,

and every eye was fixed upon them. They stood it well—Bernard, because of his utter unconsciousness of the sensation his advent had created amongst the ladies of the neighbourhood; Randulf, because he was naturally at ease in the presence of women, and also because he did know all about Aglionby and his importance, and was well aware that he had been eagerly speculated about, and that more than one matron then present had silently marked him down, even in advance, in her book of 'eligibles.' Therefore it was with a feeling of deep gratification, and in a louder voice than usual, that he introduced Aglionby to his sister.

Bernard, whose observing faculties were intensely keen, if his range of observation in social matters was limited, had become aware of the hush which had fallen like a holy calm upon the assembled multitude. He bowed to Miss Danesdale, and stood by her side, sustaining the inspection with

which he was favoured, with a dark, sombre indifference which was really admirable.

The mothers thought, 'He is quiet and reserved; anything might be made of him, with that figure and that self-possession.' The daughters who were young thought, 'What a delightfully handsome fellow! So dark! Such shoulders, and such eyes!' The daughters who were older thought how very satisfactory to find he was a man whom one could take up and even be intimate with, without feeling as if one ought to apologise to one's friends about him, and explain how he came to visit with them.

Miss Danesdale said something to Aglionby in so low a tone that he had to stoop his head, and say he begged her pardon.

'Will you not sit there?' She pointed to a chair close to herself, which he took. 'Randulf, does papa know Mr. Aglionby is here?'

'I sent to tell him,' replied Randulf, who was making the circuit of the dowagers and the beauties present, and saying something

that either was or sounded as if it were meant to be agreeable to each in turn.

'Of course he plants himself down beside Mrs. Malleson,' thought Miss Danesdale, drawing herself up, in some annoyance, 'when any other woman in the room was entitled to a greater share of his attention . . . Did you drive or ride from Scar Foot, Mr. Aglionby?'

'I drove, I don't ride—yet.'

'Don't ride!' echoed Miss Danesdale, surprised almost into animation. 'How very . . . don't you like it?'

'As I never had the chance of trying, I can hardly tell you,' replied Aglionby, with much *sang froid*, as he realised that to these ladies a man who did not ride, and hunt, and fish, and shoot, and stalk deer, and play croquet and tennis, was doubtless as strange a phenomenon as a man who was not some kind of a clerk or office man would be to Lizzie Vane.

'Were there no horses where you lived?'

suggested a very pretty girl who sat opposite to him, under the wing of a massive and stately mamma, who started visibly on hearing her child thus audaciously uplift her voice to a man and a stranger.

'Certainly there were,' he replied, repressing the malevolent little smile which rose to his lips, and speaking with elaborately grave politeness, 'for those who had money to keep them and leisure to ride them. I had neither until the other day.'

'I beg your pardon, I'm sure,' said the young lady, blushing crimson, and more disconcerted (as is almost universally the case) at having extracted from anyone a confession, even retrospective, of poverty, than if she had been receiving an offer from a peer of the realm.

'Pray do not mention it. No tea, thank you,' to Philippa, who, anxious to divert the conversation from what she concluded must be to their guest so painful a topic, had just proffered him a cup.

'And do you like Scar Foot?' she said, in her almost inaudible voice; to which Bernard replied, in his very distinct one:

'Yes, I do, exceedingly!'

'But you have hardly had time to decide yet,' said the girl who had already addressed him.

Various motives prompted her persistency. First and foremost was the consideration that as in any case she would have a homily on the subject of forwardness, and 'bad form,' she would do her best to deserve it. Next, she was displeased (like Miss Danesdale) to see Randulf seat himself beside Mrs. Malleson, as if very well satisfied, to the neglect of her fair self, and resolved to fly at what was after all, just now, higher game.

'Have I not? As how?' he inquired, and all the ladies inwardly registered the remark that Mr. Aglionby was very different from Randulf Danesdale, and indeed from most of their gentleman acquaintances.

They were not quite sure yet, whether they

liked or disliked the keen, direct glance of his eyes, straight into those of his interlocutor, and the somewhat curt and imperious tone in which he spoke. But he was, they were all quite sure, the coming man of that part of the world. He must be trotted out, and had at balls, and treated kindly at dinner-parties, and have the prettiest girls allotted to him as his partners at those banquets, and married to one of the said pretty girls—sometime. His presence would make the winter season, with its hunt and county balls, its dinners and theatricals, far more exciting. Pleasing illusions, destined in a few minutes to receive a fatal blow.

'Why, you can hardly have felt it your own yet. We heard you had visitors—two ladies,' said the lovely Miss Askam, from which remark Aglionby learnt several things; amongst others, that young ladies of position could be very rude sometimes, and could display want of taste as glaring as if they had been born *bourgeoisie.*

'So I have. Mrs. and Miss Conisbrough were my guests until yesterday, when, I am sorry to say, they left me,' he answered.

He thought he detected a shade of mockery in the young lady's smile and tone, which mockery, on that topic, he would not endure; and he looked at her with such keen eyes, such straight brows, and such compressed lips, that the youthful beauty, unaccustomed to such treatment, blushed again—twice in the same afternoon, as one of her good-natured friends remarked.

Philippa came to the rescue by murmuring that she hoped Mrs. Conisbrough was better.

'Yes, thank you. I believe she is nearly well now.'

'Do you know all the Misses Conisbrough?' pursued Miss Danesdale, equally anxious with Miss Askam to learn something of the terms on which Aglionby stood with those he had dispossessed, but flattering herself that she approached the subject with more *finesse* and delicacy.

Aglionby felt much as if mosquitoes were drinking his blood, so averse was he to speak on this topic with all these strangers. He looked very dignified and very forbidding indeed, as he replied coldly :

'I was introduced to them yesterday, so I suppose I may say I do.'

'They are great friends of Randulf's,' said Miss Danesdale exasperated, as she saw by a side-glance that her brother was still paying devoted attention to Mrs. Malleson. Also she knew the news would create much disturbance in the bosoms of those her sisters then assembled ; and, thirdly, she had an ancient dislike to the Misses Conisbrough for being poor, pretty, and in a station which made it impossible for her to ignore them.

'Are they ?' said Aglionby, simply ; 'then I am sure, from what I have seen of my cousins, that he is very fortunate to have such friends.'

'There I quite agree with you,' drawled Randulf, whom no one had imagined to be

listening; 'and so does Mrs. Malleson. We've been talking about those ladies just now.'

A sensation of surprise was felt amongst the company. How was it that these Misses Conisbrough had somehow engrossed the conversation? It was stupid and unaccountable, except to Miss Askam, who wished she had never given those tiresome men the chance of talking about these girls.

But the severest blow had yet to come. When the nerves of those present had somewhat recovered from the shock of finding the Misses Conisbrough raised to such prominence in the conversation of their betters, Miss Danesdale said she hoped Bernard would soon come and dine with them. Was he staying at Scar Foot at present? All the matrons listened for the reply, having dinners of their own in view, or, if not dinners, some other form of entertainment.

'I hardly know,' was the reply. 'I shall

have to go to Irkford soon, but I don't exactly know when.'

'Irkford! That dreadful, smoky place?' said Miss Askam. 'What possible attractions can such a place have for you, Mr. Aglionby?'

'Several. It is my native place, and all my friends live there, as well as my future wife, whom I am going to see. Perhaps those don't count as points of attraction with you?'

While the sensation caused by this announcement was still at its height, and while Randulf was malevolently commenting upon it, and explaining to Mrs. Malleson what pure joy it caused him, Sir Gabriel entered, creating a diversion, and covering Miss Askam's confusion, though not before she had exclaimed, with a *naïveté* born of great surprise:

'I did not know you were engaged!'

'That is very probable; indeed I do not see how you possibly could have known it,'

Bernard had just politely replied as Sir Gabriel made his appearance.

There was a general greeting. Then by degrees the ladies took their departure. Aglionby managed somehow to get himself introduced to Mrs. Malleson, whose name he had caught while Randulf spoke. Bernard said he had found Mr. Malleson's card yesterday, and hoped soon to return his call: he added, with a smile into which he could when, as now, he chose, infuse both sweetness and amiability, 'Miss Conisbrough told me to be sure to make a friend of you, if I could, so I hope you will not brand me as "impossible" before giving me a trial;' at which Mrs. Malleson laughed, but said pleasantly enough that after such a touching appeal nothing could be impossible. Then she departed too, and Aglionby felt as if this little aside alone had been worth the drive to Danesdale Castle ten times over.

Sir Gabriel asked Aglionby to stay and dine with them, as he was. They were quite

alone, and Philippa would certainly excuse his morning dress. He accepted, after a slight hesitation, for there was something about both Sir Gabriel and his son which Bernard felt to be congenial, unlike though they all three were to one another.

After Philippa had gone, and the wine had gone round once or twice, Sir Gabriel rose to join his daughter, with whom he always passed his evening; and to do Philippa Danesdale justice, she looked upon her father as the best of men and the finest of gentlemen.

Her one love romance had occurred just after her mother's death, when Randulf was yet a child, incapable of understanding or sympathising, and when her father was bowed down with woe. Philippa had given up her lover, and remained with her father; who had not forgotten the circumstance, as some parents have a habit of forgetting such little sacrifices. Thus it came to pass that if 'the boy' was the most tenderly loved, it was

Philippa's word which was law at Danesdale Castle.

'Suppose we come to my room, and have a chat,' suggested Randulf. 'We can join the others later.'

Nothing loth, Aglionby followed him to a den which looked, on the first view, more luxurious than it really was. When it came to be closely examined there was more simplicity than splendour in it, more refinement than display. In after-days, when he had grown intimate as a loved brother with both the room and its owner, Bernard said that one resembled the other very closely. Randulf's room was a very fair reflex of Randulf's mind and tastes. The books were certainly numerous, and many of them costly. There were two or three good water-colours on the walls; some fine specimens of pottery, Persian, Chinese, and Japanese; one or two vases, real Greek antiques, of pure and exquisite shape and design, gladdening the eye with their clean and clear simplicity. In

one corner of the room there was an easel with a portfolio standing on it, and two really comfortable lounging-chairs.

'The rest of the chairs,' said their owner, wheeling up one for Bernard's accommodation, 'are uncomfortable. I took care of that, for I hold that, in a room like this, two is company, more is none whatever, so I discourage a plurality of visitors by means of straight backs and hard seats.'

He handed a box of cigars to Aglionby, plunged himself into the other chair, and stretched himself. Somewhere in the background there was a lamp, which, however, gave but a dim light.

'Do you know,' said Randulf, presently, 'I was in the same condition as Miss Askam this afternoon. I didn't know you were engaged.'

Aglionby laughed.

'She seemed surprised. I don't know why she should have been. I thought her somewhat impertinent, and I don't see what my affairs could possibly be to her.'

'She is a precocious young woman—as I know to my cost. Of course your affairs were something to her, so long as you were rich and a bachelor. Surely you could understand that.'

'Good Lord!' was all Aglionby said, in a tone of surprised contempt.

'My affairs have been a good deal to her up to now,' continued Randulf, tranquilly. 'I was amused to see how she dropped me, as if I had been red-hot shot, when you appeared on the scene and——'

'Don't expose her weaknesses—if she has such weaknesses as those,' said Bernard, laughing again.

'I won't. But she is very handsome—don't you think so?'

'Yes, very. Like a refined and civilised gipsy—I know some one who far surpasses her, though, in the same style.'

'Who is that?'

'The youngest Miss Conisbrough.'

'Yes, you are right. But is it allowable to

ask the name of the lady you are engaged to ?'

'Why not ? Her name is Elizabeth Fermor Vane, and she lives at Irkford, as I mentioned before.'

'It will be a matter of much speculation, amongst those ladies whom you saw this afternoon, what Miss Vane is like.'

'Will it ? How can the subject affect them ?'

'Well, you see, you will be one of our leading men in the Dale, if you take that place amongst us that you ought to have—and the wife of a country gentleman is as important a person as himself, almost.'

Bernard paused, reflecting upon this. The matter had never struck him in that light before. Lizzie taking a leading part amongst the Danesdale ladies. Charming creature though she was, he somehow failed to realise her doing it. He could have more easily imagined even his little tormentor, Miss Askam, moving with ease in such a sphere.

After a pause, he said, feeling impelled to confide to a certain extent in Randulf:

'I had not thought of that before, but of course you are right. But I am very undecided as to what my future movements will be. I do not in the least know how Miss Vane will like the idea of living here. Before I can decide anything, she will have to come over and see the place. I have asked my aunt, Mrs. Bryce, to come and see me, and I shall try to get Miss Vane to come here soon. I think she should see the place in winter, so that she can know what she has to expect when it is at its worst.'

'Queer way of putting it,' murmured Randulf, thinking to himself, 'perhaps he wants to "scare" her away. Why couldn't he have married one of the Conisbroughs and settled everything in that way?'

Bernard proceeded succinctly to explain how Lizzie had become engaged to him under the full conviction that he would always inhabit a town.

Randulf murmured assent, surveying his guest the while from under his half-closed lids, and remarking to himself that Aglionby seemed to speak in a very dry, business-like way of his engagement.

'Influence of Irkford, perhaps,' he thought. 'And yet, that fellow is capable of falling in love in something different from a business-like way, unless I'm much mistaken about him.'

The conversation grew by degrees more intimate and confidential. The two young men succeeded in letting one another see that each had been favourably impressed with the other; that they had liked one another well so far, and felt disposed to be friendly in the future. They progressed so far, that at last Aglionby showed Randulf a likeness of Lizzie, after first almost upsetting his host's gravity by remarking, half to himself:

'If I have it with me. I may have left it——'

'In your other coat-pocket,' put in Randulf, with imperturbable gravity, whereat they both

laughed, and Bernard, finding the little case containing his sweetheart's likeness (to which he had not paid much attention lately), handed it to Randulf, saying:

'Photographs never do give anything but a pale imitation, you know, but the likenesses, as likenesses, are good. She "takes well" as they say, and those were done lately.'

Randulf, with due respect, took the case in his hand, and contemplated the two likenesses, one a profile, the other a three-quarter face. In the former she had been taken with a veil or scarf of thick black lace, coquettishly twisted about her throat and head; the photograph was a good one, and the face looked out from its dark setting, pure and clear, with mouth half smiling, and eyelids a little drooping. In the other, Miss Vane had given free scope to her love for fashion, or what she was pleased to consider fashion. The hideous bushy excrescence of curls bulged over her forehead; ropes of false pearls were wound about her neck; her dress was composed of

some fancy material of contrasting shades, the most *outré* and unfitting possible to imagine for a black and white picture. And in that, too, she was triumphantly pretty.

Randulf had asked to see the likeness: he was therefore bound to say something about it. After a pause he remarked:

'She must be wonderfully pretty.'

'She is a great deal prettier than that,' replied Bernard, amiably, and Randulf, thanking him, returned the case to him.

Now Randulf had a topic very near his heart too—a topic which he thought he might be able to discuss with Aglionby. The two young men had certainly drawn wonderfully near to each other during this short evening of conversation. The fact was, that each admired the other's qualities. Aglionby's caustic abruptness; his cool and steady deportment, and his imperturbable dignity and self-possession, under his changed fortunes, pleased Randulf exceedingly. He liked a man who could face the extremes of fortune

with unshaken nerve; carry himself proudly and independently through evil circumstances, and accept a brilliant change with calm nonchalance.

Randulf's *sang froid*, his unconventional manner, his independence of his luxurious surroundings, his innate hardiness and simplicity of character, pleased Aglionby. But Bernard's feelings towards Randulf were, it must be remembered, comparatively simple; Randulf's sentiments towards Bernard were vaguer—he felt every disposition to like him thoroughly, and to make a friend of him; but he had a doubt or two; there were some points to be decided which he was not yet clear about. He said, after a pause:

'I was very cool to ask you to show me Miss Vane's likeness. I owe you something in return. Look at these!'

He rose, and opening the portfolio before spoken of, drew out two sketches, and bringing the lamp near, turned it up, and showed the pictures to Bernard.

'What do you think of those?' he asked.

Aglionby looked at them.

'Why, this is Danesdale Castle, unmistakably, and well done too, I should say, though I am no judge. It looks so spirited.'

'Now look at the other.'

It was Randulf and his dogs. Aglionby, keenly sensible of the ridiculous, burst out laughing.

'That's splendid! but you must be very amiably disposed towards the artist to take such a "take-off" good-naturedly.'

'Isn't it malicious? Done by some one, don't you think, who must have seen all my weak points at a glance, and who knew how to make the most of them?'

'Exactly,' said Bernard, much amused, and still more so to observe the pleased complacency with which Randulf spoke of a drawing which, without being a caricature, made him look so absurd. 'Is he a friend of yours—the artist?' he asked.

'It was left to my discretion, whether I told

the name of the artist or not. You must promise that it goes no further.'

'Certainly.'

'They were drawn by Miss Delphine Conisbrough.'

Bernard started violently: his face flushed all over—he laid the drawings down, looking earnestly at Randulf.

'By Judith Conisbrough's sister?' he asked.

'The same,' said Randulf, puffing away imperturbably, and thinking, 'It is just as I thought. That little piece of wax-work whose likeness I have seen, cannot blind him so that he doesn't know a noble woman when he meets her.' And he waited till Bernard said:

'You amaze me. There is surely very high talent in them: you ought to be a better judge than me. Don't you think them very clever?'

'I think them more than clever. They have the very highest promise in them.

The only thing is, her talent wants cultivating.

'She should have some lessons,' said Bernard, eagerly.

'So I ventured to tell her, but she said——' he paused, and then went on, in a voice whose tenderness and regret he could not control, 'that they were too poor.'

He looked at Bernard.

'If he has any feeling on the subject,' he thought, 'that ought to fetch him.'

It 'fetched' Bernard in a manner which Randulf had hardly calculated upon. He started up from his chair, forgetting the strangeness of speaking openly on such a subject to so recent an acquaintance. He had been longing to speak to some one of his griefs connected with his cousins: this was too good an opportunity to be lost.

'Too poor!' he exclaimed, striding about the room. 'She told you that? Good God! will they never have punished me enough?'

The veins in his forehead started out. His perturbation was deep and intense. Randulf laid his cigar down, and asked softly:

'Punished you—how do you mean?'

'I mean with their resentment—their implacable enmity and contempt. To tell you that she was *too poor*—when——'

'It must have been true.'

'Of course it is true; but it is their own fault.'

'I don't understand.'

'But I will explain. It is a mystery I cannot unravel. Perhaps you can help me.'

He told Randulf of his desire to be just, and how Judith had at first promised not to oppose his wishes. Then he went on:

'What has caused her to change her mind before I spoke to her again, I cannot imagine. I fear I am but a rough kind of fellow, but in approaching the subject with Miss Conisbrough, I used what delicacy I could. I told her that I should never enjoy a moment's pleasure in possessing that of which they

were unjustly deprived—which I never shall. I reminded her of her promise: she flatly told me she recalled it. Well'—he stood before Randulf, and there were tones of passion in his voice—'I humbled myself before Miss Conisbrough, I entreated her to think again, to use her influence with her mother, to meet me half-way, and help me to repair the injustice. I was refused—with distress it is true—but most unequivocally. Nor would she release me until I had promised not to urge the matter on Mrs. Conisbrough, who, I surmise, would be less stern about it. Miss Conisbrough is relentless and strong. She was not content with that. She not only had a horror of my money, but even of me, it appears. She made me promise not to seek them out or visit them. By dint of hard pleading I was allowed to accompany them home, and be formally introduced to her sisters—no more. That is to be the end of it. I tell you, because I know you can understand it. For

the rest of the world I care nothing. People may call me grasping and heartless if they choose. They may picture me enjoying my plunder, while Mrs. Conisbrough and her daughters are wearing out their lives in—— Do you wonder that I cannot bear to think of it?' he added passionately.

'No, I don't. It is the most extraordinary thing I ever heard.'

'You think so? I am glad you agree with me. Tell me—for I vow I am so bewildered by it all that I hardly know whether I am in my senses or out of them—tell me if there was anything strange in my proposal to share my inheritance with them—anything unnatural?'

'The very reverse, I should say.'

'Or in my going to Miss Conisbrough about it, rather than to her mother?'

'No, indeed!'

'It never struck me beforehand that I was contemplating doing anything strange or wrong. Yet Miss Conisbrough made me feel myself very wrong. She would have it so, and

I own that there is something about her, her nature and character are so truly noble, that I could not but submit. But I submit under protest.'

'I am glad you have told me,' said Randulf, reflectively. 'Now all my doubts about you have vanished.'

'Could nothing be done through these drawings?' suggested Aglionby. 'Could you not tell Delphine that some one had seen them who admired them exceedingly.'

'I see what you mean,' said Randulf, with a smile. 'She has great schemes for working, and selling her pictures, and helping them, and so on. But I have a better plan than that. I must work my father round to it, and then I must get her to see it. She shall work as much as she pleases and have as many lessons as she likes—when she is my wife.'

Aglionby started again, flushing deeply. Randulf's words set his whole being into a fever.

'That is your plan?' said he in a low voice.

'That is my plan, which no one but you knows. However long I have to wait, she shall be my wife.'

'I wish you good speed in your courtship, but I fear your success won't accomplish *my* wishes in the matter.'

'Miss Conisbrough must have some reason for the strange course she has taken,' said Randulf. 'Do you think we are justified in trying to discover that reason, or are we bound not to inquire into it?'

There was a long pause. Then Aglionby said darkly: 'I have promised.'

'But I have not.'

Bernard shook his head.

'I don't believe, whatever it may be, that anyone but Miss Conisbrough is cognisant of it.'

'Well, let me use my good offices for you, if ever I have a chance. If ever I know them well enough to be taken into their con-

fidence, I shall use my influence on your side —may I?'

'You will earn my everlasting gratitude if you do. And if it turns out that they do want help—that my cousin Delphine has to work for money, you will let me know. Remember,' he added, jealously, 'it is my right and duty, as their kinsman, to see that they are not distressed.'

'Yes, I know, and I shall not forget you.'

Randulf, when his guest had gone, soliloquised silently:

'That fellow is heart and soul on my side. He doesn't know himself whither he is drifting. I'd like to take the odds with anyone, that he never marries that little dressed-up doll whose likeness he is now carrying about with him.'





CHAPTER X.

'WINTER OF PALE MISFORTUNE.'

AT Yoresett House the winter promised to be a winter indeed; a 'winter of pale misfortune.' For three days after her conversation with old Mrs. Paley, Judith had maintained silence, while her heart felt as if it were slowly breaking. She had revolved a thousand schemes in her mind. Strange and eerie thoughts had visited her in her desolation. She loved her two sisters with all the love of her intense and powerful nature. She cherished them, and always had done: she was capable of self-immolation for their

sakes. But her reason, which was as strong as her heart (which combination made her what she was) told her that in this case self-immolation would be vain. Rhoda might be left unconscious and happy for the present, but Delphine must know the truth, and that soon. Immolation would be required from her also. Judith shuddered as she thought of it. When her younger sisters casually mentioned Randulf Danesdale's name, and laughed and jested with one another about him, Judith felt as if some one had suddenly dealt her a stab, or a blow, which took away her breath.

Was there no help? she asked herself. Could this sacrifice by no means be avoided? If *she* kept her lips for ever sealed, sacrificed her own future, let them go their way, and took upon herself never to leave and never to betray that mother who—she resolutely refused, even to herself, to call her mother's deed by any name, repeating, 'It was for our sakes, I suppose; it was out of love for

her children, as she thought.' Would not that do? Were Delphine and Rhoda to bear the punishment for a sin which had been committed before they were born?

More than once a gleam of hope crossed her spirit; she almost thought that her plan would answer. Then came the argument:

'No. You must not allow this affair to go further. You must not allow one of *your* family to enter that of Sir Gabriel Danesdale, whose unstained name and unsullied honour are his pride and delight. You would let your sister marry a man—for you know he wishes to marry her—she all unconscious as well as he—of what hung over her. You might resolve never to betray the secret, but you can never be perfectly certain that it will not leak out. Some day Randulf *might* discover the truth—and what might he not in his bitterness do or say? Besides, it would be wrong; that is all that concerns you. Do not dally any longer with this chimerical, wicked plan.'

She could see no other solution to the question. She closed her eyes—closed her heart, and hardened it against the contemplation of that anguish which was to come; and after waiting three whole days, she went to Delphine on the afternoon of the fourth, when the girl was upstairs with her painting. Rhoda was out. Mrs. Conisbrough was taking her afternoon rest.

Delphine turned a smiling face to her sister. Of late, she had bloomed out more lovely than ever. Neither cold, nor poverty, nor gloomy prospects had had the power to impair her beauty and its development. In her heart she carried a secret joy which was life and light, hope and riches to her. She was going to spend a very happy afternoon. But Judith's presence never disturbed her. She called to her to shut the door, because the wind was cold, and to come and look at her picture, and her voice as she spoke rang clear as a bell.

'Yes,' said Judith, 'and I have something

to say to you, which it would not be well for anyone to overhear.'

She closed the door, and sat down. She trembled and felt faint: she could not stand. It was one thing, and one that was bad enough, to hear the horrid story from other lips; it was another—and a ghastly one—to have to tell it with her own, to her innocent sister. To speak to Delphine about such things—to let her see them near—seemed to Judith to be insulting her. But it had to be done. She gathered up her courage in both hands, as it were, and began.

The conversation was not a long one. It was began in low tones, which grew ever fainter and more hesitating. When Judith at last rose again from her chair and looked at Delphine, the latter looked to her former self exactly what a dead girl looks compared with one living—as a lily after a thunder-storm has battered and shattered and laid it low, in comparison with the same flower in the dewy calm of an early summer morning.

The elder girl stood with her white lips, and her fixed eyes, and constrained expression, looking upon the other, waiting for her to utter some word. But none came. Delphine, her face blanched within its frame of waving golden hair—her eyes fixed as if upon some point thousands of miles away, to which something she loved had withdrawn itself, was motionless and silent.

Judith at last stretched out her hands, and exclaimed:

'Delphine, if you do not speak, I shall go mad! Give me my due—give me the wretched consolation of hearing you say that I could not have done otherwise.'

Delphine smiled slightly, and her gaze came abruptly to earth again. She saw her sister, and said, softly:

'Poor Judith! No. You could have done nothing else. But you don't expect me to thank you for it, do you?'

'Delphine!'

'You could have done nothing else. But

you see you had nothing to lose. I had all the world—all the world.'

She turned away. Judith went out of the room, away to her own chamber—seeing nothing, hearing nothing. She locked herself up, and, for the first time giving way, cast herself in an utter abandonment of anguish upon her bed, and buried her face in the pillow; thinking that it would be good for her if she could never see the sun again. If Delphine had known—but she did not know—she never should know. But if she had known—if the story of her sister's heart for the last fortnight could have been laid bare before her—would she have turned away with a few cold words, as she had done—hugging her own grief—oblivious that others could have any?

No, no! Judith swore to herself, with passionate fervour, her sweet sister could not have been so wrapped, so engrossed in herself. She should not know—it would only add poignancy to the anguish she was

obliged to endure. The worst, surely, had been consummated, but she did not dare to think of Delphine alone, upstairs.

The worst, morally considered, was perhaps over, but there were trials yet to come, which were bad to bear. They heard, as in a tiny country-town everything is heard, of Aglionby's departure for Irkford. Then November set in, and the days became shorter, darker, and colder. Mrs. Conisbrough grew more and more fretful and feeble, and still talked sometimes of consulting some other lawyer, of disputing John Aglionby's will, and held forth on Bernard's greed and injustice in a manner which used to send Judith flying upstairs to pace about her room with every feeling in a state of the wildest tumult.

It was too cold for Delphine to pursue her work upstairs. The girls had nothing to do; nothing on which to spend their energies. When the few domestic things were arranged they had the whole day before them, with

absolutely no pressing occupation of any kind. The situation grew hideous and ghastly to Judith. She and her sisters preserved their physical health by means of the regular walks which, so long as it did not actually snow or rain, they took daily. And Delphine had a fitful gaiety which oppressed her sister, while neither long walks, nor arduous work, nor anything else, put the faintest flush into Judith's cheek, nor called any spontaneous smile to her lips.

She took longer walks than her sisters, went out oftener alone; penetrated to wilder recesses, more desolate spots than they did. She was, in her stature and her strength, a daughter of the gods, and had always been able to tire out both her sisters, while she herself felt no trace of fatigue. She did not fear the strange and lonely hills; they had a weird fascination for her, and in this her trouble she was wont often to seek their silent company.

One afternoon, in a wilder and bitterer

mood than usual, she had gone out, and walking fast and far, had found herself at last on the uppermost ridge of a wild mountain road. From where she stood, she could see on the one hand into Danesdale, her home, dear to her, despite what she had suffered there—on the other, into grim Swaledale—always dark and wild, but, in this winter weather, savage and desolate beyond description. Just below her, in the mountain-side, were some ghastly holes in the limestone, of the kind known in Yorkshire as 'pots;' all were grim-looking apertures, but close to where Judith sat she saw the jaws of one of them yawning at her: it was the deepest of all—no one had ever succeeded in fathoming it. Both Rhoda and Delphine disliked this spot, which indeed had a bad name, as being dangerous to traverse after twilight, and haunted furthermore by a 'boggart,' who dwelt in this biggest and deepest limestone 'pot.' Judith had never feared the place. She sat there now, casting an occa-

sional glance at the ugly hole, with its ragged jaws, and her thoughts gathered in darkness and bitterness.

She had been reading a book—a biography, one out of several volumes lately lent to her by Dr. Lowther. It was the Letters and Memoirs of a certain great lady, then not long dead. This great lady had been thrown from her earliest youth into the midst of the gay and busy world. She had lived at courts, and for many years her companions had been courtiers. Even that had been a busy life. Even its recital made Judith's heart throb with envy as she read of it; but when the narrative went on to relate how this lady met a great statesman, politician, and party-leader, and married him, and how her house became a rendezvous for every kind of noted and illustrious man and woman, and how for the rest of her long career, not a day, scarce an hour, remained unoccupied; how to the very last the game of politics, that most thrilling and best worth

playing of all games, remained open to her, and she continued to be an influence in it—then it was that Judith felt her restless longings grow into a desire to *do*, so intense as to be almost torture. This afternoon, alone on the hill-top, she thought of it, and reflected.

'Some women have that—they have everything, and others have ***nothing***. I do not want that. I should be thankful for a very little—for a few hours of daily work that must be done, but I cannot get it. It is not right—it is not just that anyone should be doomed to a life like mine. How am I different from others? I am as much like other women as Shylock, though a Jew, was like Christians. Yet I have to do without almost everything which other women of my condition have; and I may not even work like women who are born to labour. This woman, whose life I have read, was a clever woman—a born woman of the world. I am not that, I know, but I have sense enough

and more than enough to do some of the plain rough work of the world, and to do it well, if I had it. And I may not. I may sit here, and wish I was dead. I may take country walks, and save sixpences, and nourish my mind and soul with wool-work. Oh, what *are* women sent into the world for —women like me, that is? Not even to "suckle fools and chronicle small-beer" it seems, but to do nothing. To be born, to vegetate through a term of years—to know that there is a great living world somewhere outside your dungeon, and to wish that you were in it. To eat your heart out in weariness; to consume your youth in bitterness; to grow sour and envious, and old and wretched, to find all one's little bit of enthusiasm gradually grow cold. To care only for the warmth of the fire, and the creature comforts that are left—to linger on, growing more tired and more fretful, and then to die. It is worse than that iron room which grew every day narrower, till it closed upon its

inmate and crushed him to death—much worse, for that was over in a few weeks; *this* may last fifty, sixty years. If this is to be my life, I had better read no more. To live that life, and not go mad, one wants an empty head, an ignorant mind, and a contempt for all intelligence, and I am, by some hideous mistake, destitute of all those qualities.'

She smiled in bitter mockery of herself: she felt a kind of grim contempt for herself. And she looked again towards the mouth of the hole in the hillside.

She rose up, went up to it, and stood beside it. A head that was not very steady must have reeled on looking down into the silent blackness of the chasm, from whose subterranean depths strangely tortured pillars or grey rock ascended, clothed near the surface with the most exquisite mosses and ferns, of that delicate beauty only found in limestone growths. A few fronds of hart's-tongue fern were yet green; a few fairy tufts of the cob-

webby *Cystopteris fragilis*, and some little plumes of the black maidenhair spleenwort.

'You beautiful little fringes round a sepulchre!' thought Judith. 'If I made a step down there, my grave would receive me and hush me to sleep in its arms. No one would ever know. I should rest quietly there; and who could have a finer tomb?'

She looked around again at the wild fells; still, grand, and immovable. From her earliest childhood her imagination had always connected certain images with certain hills. Addlebrough, down below there, at the other side of Danesdale, was like a blacking-brush in some way. Penhill was smiling; it reminded her of sunny days and picnics. Great Whernside, looming dim in the far distance, was like an old bald head of a giant. Great Shunner Fell, at the head of Swaledale, under one of whose mighty sides she even now stood, had always put her in mind of secrets, of death, storm, and darkness; perhaps because of the many tales she had

heard of the treacherous river which was one of the streams springing from it. Turning again towards Danesdale, she saw a tiny corner of Shennamere, peeping out from under the shoulder of a great hill. A faint ray of sunshine touched it. Judith's face changed. Scar Foot was there—and Bernard Aglionby.

'I'm sure his creed never told him to throw himself into a hole when things went wrong with him,' she said to herself; and turning her back upon Shunner Fell and the ugly 'pot,' she walked swiftly homewards.

As she arrived at the door of her house a man in livery rode up with a note. It was one of the Danesdale servants.

Judith took the note from him. He said he had been told not to wait for an answer, and rode away. The note was directed to Mrs. Conisbrough. Judith took it in and gave it to her mother. She opened it, looked at it, and said:

'It seems like a card of invitation. Read it, Rhoda; I haven't my glasses here.'

Rhoda read out, in a loud and important voice:

'"Sir Gabriel and Miss Danesdale request the pleasure of Mrs. and the Misses Conisbrough's company, on the evening of Thursday, Dec. 31st. Dancing at 8.30.

'"R. S. V. P."

'How absurd to send such a thing!' remarked Rhoda, flicking it with her finger. 'It is that horrid, spiteful Philippa's doing. I know she hates us, and she knows that none of you can go, so she adds insult to injury in that way.'

'Nonsense, Rhoda!' said Judith. 'She has simply done her duty in sending the invitation. It is for us to take it or leave it, and of course that means, leave it.'

'Of course,' echoed Delphine, whose face had flushed, and whose hand trembled so that her work suffered.

'I do wish,' observed Mrs. Conisbrough, in

a voice of intense irritation, 'that I might be allowed to have *some* voice in the regulation of my own affairs. I must say, you all forget yourselves strangely. The invitation is addressed to me, and it is for me to say whether it shall be accepted or not. I intend to go to the ball, and I intend you, Judith and Delphine, to go with me.'

'*Mother!*' broke from both the girls at once.

Mrs. Conisbrough's face was flushed. There was the sanguine hue, the ominous look in her eyes, which, as Judith well knew, betokened very strong internal excitement, and which Dr. Lowther had repeatedly told her was 'bad, very bad.' She felt it was dangerous to oppose her mother, yet she could not yield without a word, to what appeared to her in her consternation an idea little short of insane. Accordingly, as Mrs. Conisbrough did not answer their first exclamation, Judith pursued gently, yet with determination:

'How can we possibly go?'

'What is there to prevent your going?' asked her mother, trifling nervously with her teaspoon, and with tightened lips and frowning brows. 'We are equal to any of those who will be there, and a great deal superior to *some*.'

'Yes, I know; but the money, mother, in the first place. We car hardly present ourselves in spotted muslins, and I really do not know of any more elegant garments that we possess.'

She strove to speak jestingly, but there was a bitter earnest in her words.

'Pray leave that to me. I am not so utterly destitute as you seem to imagine. Of course you will require new dresses, and you will have them.'

This information was certainly something unexpected to the girls. Judith, however, advanced her last argument, one which she had been unwilling to use before.

'Mother,' she said, 'you know we—we are

in mourning. Uncle Aglionby will not have been dead three months, and—and—every-one will talk.'

Mrs. Conisbrough's eyes flashed fire.

'It is for that very reason that I shall make a point of going,' she said. 'I recognise no claim on my respect in that man's memory. I consider the opportunity is a providential one. Half the county will be at the ball, and they shall know—they shall see for themselves, who it is that has been passed over, in order that an upstart clerk, or shopman, or something, may be raised into the place which ought to have been mine and yours.'

'*Mother!*' exclaimed Judith, in an accent of agony, while the other two girls sat still; Delphine pale again, her eyes fixed on the ground; Rhoda looking from one to the other with a startled expression, this being the first she had known of any dispute between her mother and sisters.

'Be silent!' said Mrs. Conisbrough, turn-

ing upon Judith angrily; 'and do not add to my troubles by opposing me in this unseemly manner. I intend you to go to the dance, and will hear no further complaints. Please to write to Miss Danesdale, accepting her invitation, and let it go to the post to-morrow. As for your dresses, there is time enough to think about them afterwards.'

Judith felt that there was no more to be said. She was silent, but her distress, as she thought of the coming ordeal, only augmented, until the prospect before her filled her with the most inordinate dread. In anticipation she saw the eyes of 'half the county' turned upon them as they entered, and upon Bernard Aglionby, who of course would be there too. It was exactly the kind of thing from which every fibre of her nature shrank away, in utter distaste which attained almost to horror. The whole exhibition would be useless. It would simply be to make themselves, their poverty and their disappointment, a laughing-stock for the

prosperous and well-to-do people who had gossiped over them, and what had happened to them—who would, if they had had John Aglionby's money, have received them with open arms as old friends, just as they had already received Bernard as a new one.

And her mother? That was a terror in addition. She knew that Mrs. Conisbrough could not go through such an evening without strong agitation—agitation almost as violent as that which had made her ill at Scar Foot. Suppose anything of the kind happened at Danesdale Castle? The idea was too terrible. It made Judith feel faint in anticipation. But the more she thought of it, the less could she see her way out of it all. She scarcely dared speak to Delphine, who, however, said very little about it. Judith at last asked her almost timidly:

'What is to be done, Del? How are we to escape?'

'We cannot escape,' replied Delphine, composedly. 'The only thing is to let mamma

have her own way, and say nothing. The more we oppose her, the worse it will be for us.'

She would say no more. After all, thought Judith, it was only natural. She could not expect Delphine to expatiate upon her feelings in advance of the event.

Surely never before was preparation made for a ball by two young and beautiful girls, with less lightness of heart. Everything about it was loathsome to Judith. Her heart rebelled when her mother informed her shortly and decidedly, that out of the small sum of money which she had at different times saved, she intended to get them what she called 'proper and suitable dresses, such as no one could find any fault with.'

To Judith's mind it was like throwing so much life-blood away—not for its own sordid sake, but because of what it represented. It would have gone a long way towards helping them to remove from Yoresett, and that was now the goal to which all her thoughts turned. But Mrs. Conisbrough was not to

be gainsaid. She ordered the dresses from a fashionable milliner in York, and they arrived about ten days before the ball. The girls looked askance at the box containing the finery. It might have held a bomb, which would explode as soon as it was opened. Mrs. Conisbrough desired them to try their gowns on that night, that she might see how they fitted, and judge of the effect. It was a scene at once painful in the extreme, and yet dashed with a kind of cruel pleasure. Mrs. Conisbrough had herself planned and ordered exactly how the dresses were to be made, and she had a fine natural taste in such matters.

Judith put on her garment without so much as looking at herself in the glass, unheeding all Rhoda's enraptured exclamations. Delphine, as her slender fingers arranged the wreath of dewy leaves upon her corsage, felt her heart thrill involuntarily, as she caught a glimpse of her own beauty, and thought of what might have been and what was.

'Now, you are ready. Go down and let mamma see!' cried Rhoda, who had been acting as Abigail, in an ecstasy. 'Oh, it may be very extravagant, Judith, but surely it is worth paying something for, to be beautifully dressed and look lovely, if only for one evening!'

They went into a bare, big dining-room where there was less furniture and more room to turn round than in the parlour they usually inhabited. Rhoda lighted all the available lamps and candles, and called to her mother, and Mrs. Conisbrough came to look at her daughters in their ball-dresses, as a happier woman might have done.

Judith's was a long, perfectly plain amber silk, cut square behind and before, with sleeves slightly puffed at the shoulder, and with no trimming except a little fine old lace with which Mrs. Conisbrough had supplied the milliner. It was a severely simple dress, and in its rich folds and perfect fit it showed

off to perfection the beauty of the woman who wore it.

Judith Conisbrough could not help looking like a queen in this brave attire; she could not help moving and glancing like a queen, and would always do so, in whatever garb she was attired, to whatever station of life she were reduced. She stood pale and perfectly still as her mother came in. She *could* not smile; she could not look pleased, or expectant.

The mother caught her breath as her eyes fell upon her eldest girl, and then turned to Delphine, whose dress of silk and gauze was of the purest white, enfolding her like a cloud, and trimmed with knots and wreaths of white heather-bells and small ferns: one little tuft of them nestled low down in her hair.

Delphine looked, as Rhoda had once prophesied unto her that she would, 'a vision of beauty.' Her face was ever so little flushed, and in her golden eyes there was a light of suppressed excitement.

'Mother, mother! aren't they *lovely?*' cried poor Rhoda, her buoyant paces subdued to a processional sedateness, as she circled slowly about the two radiantly-clad figures.

'Of course they are!' said Mrs. Conisbrough, curtly, still biting her lip with repressed agitation, but criticising every frill and every flower with the eyes of a woman and a connoisseur. 'I defy any of the girls who will be there to surpass them—if they approach them.'

She continued to survey them for some little time, breathing quickly, while Judith still stood motionless, her eyes somewhat downcast, wondering wretchedly whether this horrible finery *must* be worn, if this dreadful ordeal was in no way to be avoided?

Raising her eyes, full of sadness, they met those of her mother. Did Mrs. Conisbrough read anything in them? She started suddenly, drew out her handkerchief, and put it to her eyes, exclaiming brokenly and passionately:

'Why cannot I have this pleasure, like other mothers? Surely I have a right to it?'

A spasm contracted Judith's heart. No—there was the rub. She had no right to it. It was all a phantom show—all stolen; wrong, from beginning to end. Turning to Delphine, she said, rather abruptly:

'Well, I'm going to take my gown off again. Will you come too?'

As they went towards their rooms she thought:

'It cannot be worse. I cannot feel more degraded and ashamed, even at the ball itself.'

During the days that passed between this 'dress rehearsal,' as Rhoda called it, and the ball, Mrs. Conisbrough's health and spirits drooped, but she still maintained her intention of going to Danesdale Castle. Judith said nothing—what could she say? And Delphine was as silent as herself. Once Randulf Danesdale had called. They had

been out, and had missed him. Judith was thankful. They had seen nothing of Aglionby, of course. It was understood that he was away from home. It was quite certain that he was away at Christmas-time.

Three days before the ball came off, Mrs. Conisbrough was too ill to rise. Judith began to cherish a faint hope that perhaps after all they might be spared the ordeal. She was deceived. Her mother said to her:

'I want you to go to Mrs. Malleson, and tell her, with my love, that I feel far from well, and would rather not go to the ball, if she will oblige me by chaperoning you and Del. If she can't, I shall go if it kills me.'

'Mamma, won't you give it up?' said Judith, imploringly. 'For my sake, grant me this favour, and I will never oppose you again.'

'Certainly not,' said Mrs. Conisbrough, angrily. 'Understand, Judith, that I have set my mind on your going to this ball, and

go you shall. Why are you thus set upon thwarting all my plans for your benefit? How can a girl like you presume to know better than her mother?'

'Don't cry, mother,' said Judith, sorrowfully. 'I will go to Mrs. Malleson this afternoon.'

She kept her word, and found her friend in.

'My dear Judith! What a pleasant surprise! Come to the fire, and let us have a chat. How cold and starved you look!'

Judith responded as well as she could to this friendliness, and presently unfolded her errand, with burning cheeks, and a brief explanation.

Mrs. Malleson professed herself delighted.

'There is nothing I should like better than to chaperon you and Del. And you know, my dear, I think you take it too much to heart; I do really. Would you deprive your poor mother of all natural feelings—all pride in her handsome daughters? If I

were in her place, I should feel exactly the same.'

Judith smiled faintly. Of course Mrs. Malleson did not understand. How could she? She cheered the girl by her chat; gave her tea, and talked about the ball, and the gossip of the neighbourhood.

'It is to be a very brilliant affair. Sir Gabriel intends it for a sort of celebration of his son's return home. It is the first large party they will have had, you know, since Randulf came back.'

'Yes, of course.'

'What a nice fellow he is! I do so like him.'

'Yes, so do we,' said Judith, mechanically.

'Oh, and we have become quite friendly with Mr. Aglionby of Scar Foot.'

'Have you? And do you like him, too?' asked Judith, composedly.

'Very much. I couldn't say that to your mother, you know, but I can to you, because you are so good and so reasonable, Judith.'

'Oh, Mrs. Malleson, not at all! The merest simpleton must see that Mr. Bernard Aglionby is not responsible for my grand-uncle's caprice. So you like him? He has been at Irkford, I hear, visiting the lady he is engaged to.'

Judith spoke coolly and tranquilly, crushing out every spark of emotion as she proceeded.

'Yes. Of course he is going to be at the ball, and Miss Vane, his *fiancée*, is going to be there too.'

'Is she?' Judith still spoke with measured calmness. Inwardly she was thinking: 'It will be even worse than I expected. But I am glad I came here and got warned in time.'

'Yes. Mrs. Bryce, Mr. Aglionby's aunt, is staying at Scar Foot. I think he said he wanted her to live there till he was married—if she would. She is very nice. And he is bringing Miss Vane, just for this ball, and the Hunt Ball, on the 3rd of January—and

in order that she may see the place, Mr. Aglionby says. He let me see her likeness. She must be wonderfully pretty.'

'Yes, I suppose so.'

'Not to compare with Delphine, though,' pursued Mrs. Malleson, warmly. 'But then, there are not half a dozen girls in Yorkshire to compare with her. Oh, I quite long for the ball! I am sure Delphine will make a sensation; and so will you, if only you don't alarm all the men by your dignity, dear,' she added, putting her hand on Judith's shoulder. 'Girls don't go in for dignity now, you know, but for being frank and candid, and knowing everything, and talking with men on their own subjects.'

'I'm afraid Delphine and I will be failures then, for we know so few men, and certainly we do not know what their subjects are.'

'Oh, I didn't say that men liked it; only that girls do it,' laughed Mrs. Malleson, leading Judith to the door. The latter felt that now their doom was sealed.

Mrs. Malleson would not be so kind as to be taken ill before the dance. She went home and told her mother of the arrangement she had made, and Mrs. Conisbrough professed herself satisfied with it.

END OF VOL. II.

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